

A Handful of World:
The Figure of the Hand in Franz Kafka's Writings

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the figure of the hand in Kafka's literary, professional and personal writings and ties that figure to the contemporary contexts of (1) industrial labor, (2) the statistical, depersonalized perspective on the subject and its body in the modern social and insurance state, and (3) the exacerbation of these conditions during World War One. I show that hands occur in Kafka's oeuvre wherever the subject's identity, agency, and physical integrity is under negotiation. The first chapter analyzes Kafka's novel *Der Verschollene*. It links the figure of the hand with the contexts of manual labor and industrial work practices, especially Taylorism, and shows that hands emerge when there is a tension between the worker viewed as an individual and the worker as part of the larger machinery of production. The second chapter describes Kafka's professional background and his responsibilities at the Bohemian Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute, thereby providing the biographical context for Kafka's use of the hand trope. It traces the origins of social accident insurance and its inherent tension between two opposing views on the subject—the subject as impersonal part of a collective versus the subject as an individual. The chapter then provides a close reading of one of Kafka's

office writings, an illustrated report about how to prevent work accidents and in particular hand injuries. This text reveals that, even in the professional context, Kafka uses the hand as a metonymy of the threatened body, both of the worker and of its administrator. The third chapter examines the novel *Der Proceß* as an illustration of the abstract and anonymous worldview dominant in the insurance state, which threatens not only the blue-collar worker but also the white collar employee. Hands appear as random and arbitrary signs of an incomprehensible court system and are at the same time used by the protagonist to establish connections to the court and “grasp” his situation. In addition, the hand represents the writing and creating hand; by connecting the dimension of writing with the figure of the hand as primary political trope in *Der Proceß*, Kafka shows that the private and public are inseparable. The fourth chapter shows how the short but paradigmatic text “Meine zwei Hände begannen einen Kampf” draws together themes of blue-collar manual labor, white-collar responsibility and authorship by imagining a violent battle between the narrator’s left and right hand, a display of violence that should be read in the context of World War One. In his position at the insurance institute, Kafka was responsible for wounded veterans and traces of his work with amputations and prosthetics show clearly in his later texts. The dissertation will conclude with a brief analysis of “Ein Bericht Für eine Akademie” to show that the hand is the quintessentially human body part that encapsulates the violence and crises that the modern subject has to undergo in order to be a member of (human) society.

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Introduction: “Hände, die eigentlich Dampfhämmer sind”

This dissertation examines Kafka’s consistent and pervasive use of the figure of the hand. Hands appear among some of Kafka’s first recorded words, a “Poesiealbum” entry from 1900, to his last diary entry. The barely seventeen year old Kafka writes:

Aber es gibt ein lebendiges Gedenken das über alles Erinnerungswerte sanft hinfuhr *wie mit kosender Hand*. Und wenn aus dieser Asche die Lohe aufsteigt, glühend und heiß, gewaltig und stark und Du hineinstarrst, wie vom magischen Zauber gebannt, dann— — — —

Aber in dieses keusche Gedenken, *da kann man sich nicht hineinschreiben mit ungeschickter Hand und grobem Handwerkszeug*, das kann man nur in diese weißen, anspruchslosen Blätter. Das that ich am 4. September 1900¹

Though in less ornate prose, the hand remains the trope of choice for writing struggles, up to the last diary entry from 1922:

Immer ängstlicher im Niederschreiben. Es ist begreiflich. Jedes Wort, *gewendet in der Hand der Geister—dieser Schwung der Hand ist ihre charakteristische Bewegung*—wird zum Spieß, gekehrt gegen den Sprecher.²

Hands appear in all types of Kafka’s writing: They feature prominently in autobiographical writings such as letters and diaries, in his literary texts, and even in his professional office writings. They occur as a main trope in novels, short texts, and are often the exclusive subject of short reflections and self-observations. Hands not only appear in great quantity, but hand imagery often consists of unusual and

spectacular images. Striking hand passages range from the famous to the obscure.

For instance, readers may remember the image of “Hände, die eigentlich

Dampfhämmer sind” from “Auf der Galerie.”³ At the same time, hands are also

found in less well-known and rather enigmatic aphorisms, such as this one:

Mit stärkstem Licht kann man die Welt auflösen. Vor schwachen Augen wird sie fest, vor noch schwächeren bekommt sie Fäuste, vor noch schwächeren wird sie schamhaft und zerschmettert den, der sie anzuschauen wagt.⁴

This passage embodies what I intend to show in my dissertation: hands occur

wherever the relationship between the self and the world is challenged and

negotiated. Here, the world destroys its observer with its fists, and thus the

confrontation with the world occurs literally, as it does in a similar aphorism from

the same period:

A. ist in folgender Täuschung begriffen: Die Einförmigkeit dieser Welt kann er nicht ertragen. Nun ist aber die Welt bekanntlich ungemein mannigfaltig, was jederzeit nachzuprüfen ist, indem man eine Handvoll Welt nimmt und näher ansieht. Die Klage über die Einförmigkeit der Welt ist also eigentlich eine Klage über nicht genügend tiefe Vermischung mit der Mannigfaltigkeit der Welt.⁵

But also when the subject’s hand is not directly trying to examine a “handful of

world,” or the world strikes back with its fists, the hand as a figure arises to

negotiate the subject’s place in the world. This is true for the writing hands from my

initial examples and also for the hand as instrument of interpersonal relationships;

throughout Kafka’s personal writings, the hand is a prime figure to denote the

possibilities and impossibilities of establishing meaningful contact. In a letter to

Felice Bauer from November 1912, Kafka writes: “Aber jetzt haben wir uns also wieder und wollen mit einem guten Händedruck einer den andern gesünder machen und dann gesund miteinander fortleben.”⁶

Moreover, the hand in addition to being a personal trope is a figure that takes up the socio-historical context of its time. As I will show, the challenges to the subject that are negotiated through the figure of the hand are quintessentially modern challenges. This dissertation links the figure of the hand with manual labor and industrial work practices, with a view of the subject and its body under the statistical, depersonalized view predominant in the modern social and insurance state, and the exacerbation of these contexts during World War One.

I will further show that Kafka was very familiar with all of these conditions because of his work at the Bohemian Workmen’s Accident Insurance Institute (AUVA), where he began working in the summer of 1908. I focus on texts written after 1908, namely an illustrated “public relations” pamphlet written by the insurance employee Kafka that advises on how to prevent accidents from 1909, *Der Verschollene*, written between 1911 and 1914, *Der Proceß*, written in 1914 and 1915, and “Meine zwei Hände begannen einen Kampf” as well as, briefly, “Ein Bericht für eine Akademie,” both from 1917. When beginning his work at the AUVA, Kafka already had a strong interest in hands, as evidenced in the diary entry quoted initially. While one cannot know why a particular figure acquires such an importance for a writer, one can speculate Kafka was influenced in this respect by the culture into which he came of age. Especially the arts and craft movement which

had originated in England and had become influential in Europe, including Austria and Germany by the turn of the century may have played a role as a possible origin here; as a reaction to industrialization, it gave an immense importance to the handcrafted. As Mark Anderson has shown, the young Kafka was heavily influenced by “a modern *Jugendstil* aestheticism that went hand in hand with clothing reforms, nudism, rural artist communities, the arts and crafts movement.”⁷ A particularly important influence was *Der Kunstwart*, a journal he subscribed to from his Gymnasium years up to 1904, which “devoted considerable space to the relations between art and rural life, to ‘peasant’ architecture, to handcrafts such as knitting, weaving, carving, and so on, and to rural artist communities like Worpswede and Hellerau” and whose program resembled that of “such groups as the *Kunsterziehungsbewegung* and the *Werkbund*, German equivalents of William Morris’s Arts and Craft Society.”⁸ This focus on the handcrafted, as well as Kafka’s general interest in the body and the physical aspects of creative work may have been one of the reasons why the trope became so important early on, in addition to the special status of the hand as writing hand.

I argue, however, that during the time at the AUVA Kafka begins to connect the figure of the hand with the additional dimension of industrial work, and, more generally, the threatened body and subject. From this time on, these ideas inform his work. I have chosen the texts treated in this dissertation to show the influence that the work at the insurance institute had on Kafka’s literary writings. Even the imagery of the most private and intimate observations is henceforth permeated by this modern, “industrial” dimension. For example, in the same letter to Felice quoted

above, where hands appear in a romantic and somewhat conventional manner, Kafka also conjures up the unusual image of hands being connected to a steam engine:

Vorgestern in der Nacht träumte ich . . . von Dir. Ein Briefträger brachte mir zwei Einschreibebriefe von Dir, und zwar reichte er mir sie, in jeder Hand einen, mit einer prachtvoll präzisen Bewegung der Arme, die wie Kolbenstangen einer Dampfmaschine zuckten. Gott, es waren Zauberbriefe. Ich konnte soviel beschriebene Bogen aus den Umschlägen ziehn, sie wurden nicht leer.⁹

The hand here is both a trope for (Felice's) writing and of a personal connection while simultaneously being brought into an association with a piece of industrial machinery. The hand thus contains a rather unexpected dimension, anticipating the image of "Hände, die eigentlich Dampfhämmer sind" from "Auf der Galerie," a text that can be read as a description of an impending accident and that contains a tension between a personal view on the circus artist and an impersonal, statistical perspective that mirrors that of risk assessment and accident insurance.

This topic—Kafka's extensive use of hands throughout his writing, and its significance—has not been previously treated. Despite the hands' prominence, there exists no comprehensive study of Kafka's figure of the hand throughout his oeuvre.¹⁰ The hand has almost only been addressed in the larger context of gesture.¹¹ But while gesture can include hands, and hands can include gesture, these are two separate topics. More importantly, hands have not been linked to the contexts of manual labor and Kafka's expertise in industrial accidents and war related injuries.¹² Reading the hand in these contexts is important because, as I will show,

the hand is both Kafka's main trope for social critique and his most personal trope of authorial self-reflection, and an analysis of this figure proves that for Kafka, these realms are inseparable. As in the aphorism quoted above, if one wants to examine a "handful of world," one cannot do so without at the same time engaging with that world.

My readings combine careful literary analysis with these socio-historical and biographical contexts. I show that throughout Kafka's writings, the hand is used to denote the tension between the subject as an individual and as part of a collective, the subject as acting or being acted upon, and the subject in relation to challenges that threaten its boundaries and physical integrity. My first chapter is a reading of the figure of the hand in *Der Verschollene* in the context of modern work practices. In an analysis of the chapter "Der Heizer," I demonstrate how the figure of the stoker is presented as the quintessential modern worker. The text presents a tension between the view on the worker as an individual, which is reflected in Karl Roßmann's perspective, and the view on the worker as part of the ship, which is the perspective of his superiors on the ship that want to get rid of the stoker. The hands encapsulate this tension between the conflicting views. I show that the consistent focus on the Heizer's hands can be linked with contemporary work imagery, such as the clenched fist. Karl Roßmann's confusion to "read" the stoker's hands is a reflection of the inherent ambivalence and tension of the trope.

I will then show that throughout the novel, this tension between the worker as individual and as part of a larger machinery is contained in the focus on

rhythmically moving hands that evoke assembly lines and fast-paced mechanized labor. Natural movement is contrasted with an “inhuman” rhythm. Kafka’s “Amerika” is the epitome of capitalist efficiency and the hands can be seen as a commentary to the modern American methods to create such efficiency, especially Taylorism which is based on precise time and motion studies of the human body and hand and was rapidly gaining influence in Europe. Fast-paced, hyper-efficient hand movements are not limited to the factory, rather, they characterize the entirety of Karl’s American experience and they influence every interaction that Karl Roßmann has, be it professional or private.

I argue that “Amerika” is to a certain extent a contrast to Europe, but also a means of implicit critique of conditions that Kafka knew from his work at the Workmen’s Accident Insurance Institute. One of the sites of work in *Der Verschollene* that is subjected to a merciless work rhythm is a construction site on which a deadly accident occurs, a theme that Kafka was very familiar with from his own legal work and that has a special, paradigmatic status as story within a story in *Der Verschollene*, featuring the cost of efficient work to the individual through the trope of the hand that stands out as a metonymy for the unresolvable tension between the subject as an individual and as part of a collective.

My second chapter extends the discussion of the hand to Kafka’s professional writings. I will show that the professional context informs Kafka’s literary use of hand imagery by providing a close reading of one of Kafka’s office writings and illuminating the relevance of Kafka’s insurance background for the use of hands in

his literary texts. The chapter thus constitutes the historical and biographical background not only relevant for the first chapter, but also the subsequent chapters.

As I will demonstrate, Kafka started working at the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute amidst legal and social changes that were a direct result of the challenges and dangers of industrial work. Most importantly, there was a change from a notion of individual fault to the no-fault system of the social safety net that social accident insurance began to provide. In light of this transformation, the view of accidents was changing from that of an individual tragedy to an unavoidable, accepted statistical risk regarding accidents as normal. This statistical view on the subject is at odds with a view that reflects the individuality of the subject.

I will lay out how Kafka's work at the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute is at the source of the tension between these opposing views. Kafka's main tasks at the AUVA, risk classification and accident prevention, contained precisely this friction between the "statistical" and individual subject. In both realms of his job, he was also directly confronted with the dangers of industrial work and accidents to the body, especially the hand. In an accident prevention text from 1909—the text in the center of this chapter that I argue is of crucial importance—Kafka advocates the introduction of a safer machine part for wood-planing machines that would protect workers' hands. The text, which contains drawings of injured hands, reflects how Kafka operated amidst the conflicting views on the worker. I will demonstrate how the hand is not only quite literally at the intersection of the worker as part of the larger machinery of production and as vulnerable individual,

but also how the hand is used as metonymy for these problems in the text.

My third chapter reads *Der Proceß* against the backdrop of the anonymous, abstract statistical notion of the subject that Kafka encounters at the AUVA. I argue that in his novel Kafka explores how the white collar employee is affected by this notion as well, while at the same time bearing a certain responsibility for these conditions. The protagonist K. works for a bank and thus finds himself at the source of economic interchangeability and abstraction, a system similar to the anonymous and invisible court system that the text presents. Hand signs appear as random and interchangeable. This interchangeability extends to the dimensions of literal and figurative language of hands and hand-related idioms. Hands become literal organs of the “Verhandlung” and of K.’s being seized by the organism of the court, making his ordeal a physical one.

Throughout, K. is threatened by tactile transgressions, and he commits them himself in an attempt to “grasp” the invisible court. In these attempts, he seeks out contact to anybody that potentially has any connection to the court, and by trying to get close to the court, he literally touches, and oftentimes gropes, his contacts, especially women. In various constellations, hands appear as proxies and substitutes of persons and relationships. The text presents a system of erotic interchangeability which goes along with the interchangeability of the modern subject created by the economic and legal sphere.

I will argue that the abstraction and interchangeability that manifests itself through the figure of the hand must be read together with the hand as writing hand.

Hands are often shown on desks as a miniature stage. Such desk hands represent concrete and material writing hands. The desk is connected to K.'s work at the bank, the space where he also tries to write a document for the court, and the writing hands on the desk at the same time evoke the author's writing hands. By linking the hand as most personal trope to the hand as prime trope for social critique, writing is presented as inherently political.

My fourth chapter is an interpretation of "Meine zwei Hände begannen einen Kampf", a short text from 1917 that draws together all previous uses of the hands described in chapters one to three. Hands take the stage as the main protagonists in this text. The reader witnesses a struggle between the narrator's two hands that takes place on a desk. Not only does this struggle illustrate the threats to the subject and the narrator's subjectivity; through the appointment of the narrator as arbitrator it also reflects Kafka's own mediating position, the difficult role he took on in his insurance work.

Moreover, "Meine zwei Hände" is a description of a particularly violent battle. I argue that it can be read in connection with World War One. Kafka uses this text to reflect upon various war discourses, especially in the Prague press. Through the battle on the desk Kafka comments on the specific issues and challenges of war reporting, such as censorship, or the difficulties of finding neutral and objective information. The varying allegiances of the different populations of the multiethnic society of Prague are mirrored in varying loyalties and allegiances in the hand battle as well.

The war context, in turn, cannot be read without drawing the connection to Kafka's experience at the insurance institute. His professional responsibilities during the war extended to the work with amputees and their use of artificial limbs, which can be seen as the origin of images that strikingly emerge in "Meine zwei Hände" and his later writing. The responsibility of the white-collar employee, an important theme in *Der Proceß*, receives a new type of urgency through the continuing war so that it becomes apparent in this text even more distinctly. "Meine zwei Hände" illustrates a struggle for identity and agency, as well as an attack on the subject's physical and psychological boundaries, and layers it with a struggle for authorship, further intertwining the social responsibility of the white-collar employee and the writer. This relatively unknown text thus can be read as paradigmatic in relation to the trope of the hand in Kafka's work. "Meine zwei Hände" shows the inseparability of the public and the private, the personal and the political in an extreme historical and political context, and in an extreme form.

The hand stands for the violence that the modern human subject has to undergo and to perform in order to be part of human civilization. As such, the hand encapsulates what it means to be a modern human, which I will, in conclusion, address with a short examination of the ape-author Rotpeter's use of the figure of the hand in "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie."

Chapter 1

“Die rissige, fast leblose Hand”: The objectified hand and the clashing views of the worker in *Der Verschollene*

In the beginning of the novel fragment *Der Verschollene*, the protagonist Karl Roßmann is about to step off the ship that has arrived in “Newyork” when he realizes that he has forgotten his umbrella. He goes back inside the ship, where he meets the ship stoker. By the end of the chapter, as Karl is dragged away from the stoker by his uncle who has unexpectedly come to meet him, he bids farewell to the stoker, the man that he has just met about an hour earlier:

“Dir ist ja unrecht geschehen, wie keinem auf dem Schiff, das weiß ich ganz genau.” Und Karl zog seine Finger hin und her zwischen den Fingern des Heizers, der mit glänzenden Augen ringsumher schaute, als widerfahre ihm eine Wonne, die ihm aber niemand verübeln möge. . . . Und nun weinte Karl, während er die Hand des Heizers küßte, und nahm die rissige, fast leblose Hand und drückte sie an seine Wangen, wie einen Schatz, auf den man verzichten muß. (49)¹³

Since this is by no means a standard parting ritual—especially for a casual, random acquaintance like the stoker—it seems legitimate to note the peculiar nature of Karl’s gesture. Odd as it seems, though, this farewell is a very consistent conclusion of a chapter that obsessively focuses on the stoker’s hands, and it is an equally logical beginning for Karl’s American journey, as I show in this chapter. In order to fully understand this scene, the hand has to be viewed in the contexts in

which it appears in the chapter and the novel.

This chapter is an analysis of *Der Verschollene*, where the hand serves as the main trope for illustrating problems that are associated with work, especially mechanized and manual labor and the accompanying social changes. The hand is the focal point whenever the view of the worker as an individual subject clashes with the view of the worker as a replaceable part of a larger enterprise or collective. Throughout the text, the hand appears at the intersection of the individual and the collective views of the worker and the subject, between the human body and the machine, and between economic and social spheres.

In the first section of the first chapter, “Der Heizer,” the hand not only functions as a semantic signal for Karl to read and misread, but also as a conscious commentary on contemporary work practices, including allusions to contemporaneous hand imagery. The view of the stoker as an individual clashes with the view of him as a replaceable worker who is easily fired. Karl is caught in the middle of these views and tries to make sense of it all through his obsessive hand observations. However, what one might call Karl’s own “semantics and politics of the hand” only contributes to the confusion, and the hand emerges as an inherently ambiguous trope that contains and represents the tension that causes Karl’s disorientation.

The second section focuses on the depiction throughout the novel of hands in a mechanized Taylorist universe, where hands are subjected to an unnatural, inhuman work rhythm. This is not only true for the many instances where hands are

shown next to machines and technical devices; every aspect of life is dominated by the imperative for maximum speed, and any failure to comply leads Karl to further misadventures. “Amerika” as a ubiquitous factory space is also a commentary on contemporaneous production methods.

In the third section, I will demonstrate how the figure of the hand as quintessential trope depicting the tension between these views of the worker throughout the entire novel fragment is confirmed and condensed in the mise-en-abyme of the story of the work accident of Therese’s mother, one of the “hired hands” (“Handlangerinnen” [201]) at a construction site, where the tension between these world views clashes in a particularly brutal manner.¹⁴

This chapter lays out the prominence of the hand as a complex literary figure and as the novel’s primary trope, and shows its socio-historical relevance. I have found no other scholarly interpretations of the omnipresent figure of the hand in *Der Verschollene*, and no links of the trope to the theme of work.¹⁵ I provide a reading that focuses on the context of industrial labor and contemporary work practices, and while the theme of work has been commented upon early on in readings that examine the social consciousness of Kafka’s oeuvre, there are to this day very few detailed interpretations of individual texts, including *Der Verschollene*, that link the focus on contemporary work practices with a careful literary and formal analysis of the texts.¹⁶ I not only show that Kafka’s text includes these contexts, but also how it incorporates them into a narrative that illustrates the protagonist’s struggle to make sense of his surroundings.

Der Verschollene is a text that treats social themes very directly, and thus the social significance of the figure of the hand is quite straightforward by featuring the hand as the working hand. Therefore, a reading of *Der Verschollene* is an important starting point in my dissertation for showing how Kafka consistently uses the figure of the hand in a variety of contexts throughout his work, arising whenever there is conflict or confusion as to the boundary between the subject and its environment, the definition of the subject either as an individual or as part of a collective, and whether the subject is acting or being acted upon. My analysis of *Der Verschollene* thus serves not only as a basis for Chapter Two, which traces the origins of this figure in Kafka's insurance work, but also for subsequent chapters, where I will follow the development of the figure of the hand as it becomes more abstract and extreme in his later writing. Despite the complexity of the trope within the architecture of the novel, *Der Verschollene* could be considered the most direct example of the hand as an inherently political trope.

Historical change pertaining to working conditions and questions of social status is quite explicitly the theme of *Der Verschollene*. The entire novel fragment is programmatically concerned with the issues of workers and labor in the industrial age, of poverty, and of social injustice. For instance, the text presents "demonstrierend[e] Metallarbeiter" (74), a discussion of a newspaper article on an entrepreneur's exploitative business practices among workers, a strike of construction workers, and a large political rally. Amidst these elements of class conflict and social struggle, we follow Karl Roßmann's journey. He is in an ambivalent position between the enemy camps: he is the nephew of Senator Jacob,

an owner of multiple “Fabrikskartelle” (66) and an influential contact. Starting out high in terms of social hierarchy, he steadily climbs down the social ladder, and throughout the text remains utterly disoriented by issues of work, status, and class. In the first chapter, the uncle, sensing the young man’s confusion in this regard, prompts Karl “Lerne deine Stellung begreifen” (50), as he drags him away from his new friend, the ship stoker. “Lerne deine Stellung begreifen” remains Karl’s implicit challenge throughout the text: Karl’s journey is one of changing social positions and status negotiations within a universe of cheap labor and unsafe economic conditions.

Kafka referred to the first chapter, “Der Heizer,” and his intentions for the entire text of *Der Verschollene* as his “Dickens imitation” and “Dickens novel” in a diary entry referring to his reading of *David Copperfield*:

Dickens Copperfield ("Der Heizer" glatte Dickensnachahmung, noch mehr der geplante Roman. Koffergeschichte, der Beglückende und Bezaubernde, die niedrigen Arbeiten, die Geliebte auf dem Landgut die schmutzigen Häuser u.a. vor allem aber die Methode. Meine Absicht war wie ich jetzt sehe einen Dickensroman zu schreiben, nur bereichert um die schärferen Lichter, die ich der Zeit entnommen und die mattern, die ich aus mir selbst aufgesteckt hätte...).¹⁷

The socio-historical context of his own time is thus explicitly a thematic premise of the novel. He refers directly to the fact that he includes contemporary issues, adapted to his own day and age, referring to “die schärferen Lichter, die ich der Zeit entnommen hätte.” “Brighter” lights, the increased intensity, points to the economic and social issues in Kafka’s own time and the intensification of these

problems since the publication of Dickens' novel in 1850. In addition, the "brighter lights" can even be understood in a more literal and concrete fashion, in the context of the electrification of industrial work that by the beginning of the twentieth century led to a second Industrial Revolution, or Electrical Revolution, and I will show that the spaces of the steamship, and of "Amerika" are crucial choices in that respect.

1. "Da steckte jetzt alle seine Kraft": Fists, swords, and Karl's disorientation amidst changed social hierarchies and conflicting views of the individual in "Der Heizer"

Kafka programmatically puts the figure of the hand at the outset of the novel. The first chapter describes Karl Roßmann's encounter with the ship stoker, and throughout depicts Karl's exaggerated attention toward the stoker's hands. The stoker serves as an archetype of the worker, specifically the provider of physical, manual labor.

The stoker as the archetype of the modern worker

Karl's, and the reader's, very first encounter with the stoker immediately

leads to a close-up on his hands; “[er] hörte nicht auf, an dem Schloß eines kleinen Koffers zu hantieren, den er mit beiden Händen immer wieder zudrückte, um das Einschnappen des Riegels zu behorchen” (9). This is one of the earliest examples of a narrative sequence that culminates in a close examination of the hands. Although a relatively simple, straightforward image, the emphasis on the stoker’s hands consists of multiple layers. The movement of pushing and closing the suitcase lock already implies that it is carried out by the hands, so strictly speaking the specification that it is done with the hands is redundant, as is, in addition to the use of “hands” in the plural form, emphasizing that it is “both” hands that are manipulating the lock. And even before the movement is described, it is specifically called “hantieren,” thus summarizing the use of hands beforehand and creating more redundancy while semantically underlining it. Moreover, the image functions not only by singling out the hands and zooming in, but the hands are also shown to be repeating the same movement over and over again, creating additional emphasis through the moment of repetition. This excessive emphasis seems to be at odds with what first appears to be a minor, irrelevant observation, especially given the fact that Karl is in a hurry, has left his own suitcase unattended, and is supposed to be focusing on finding his umbrella rather than opening random doors to random rooms, and staring at random hand movements.

The context, however, makes it clear that the observation in fact contains important elements that we will encounter throughout the text. We soon find out what the stoker is preoccupied with while manipulating the suitcase lock—the loss of his job as ship stoker: “‘Meine Stelle wird frei,’ sagte der Heizer, gab im

Vollbewußtsein dessen die Hände in die Hosentaschen" (12). Read together with the previous description of his hands carrying out a repetitive, automatized, almost robotic movement, and within this movement of checking and focusing on the achieved mechanical goal of the "Einschnappen des Riegels," an association with mechanical manual labor is implicit.¹⁸ In addition, we are made aware of the fact that the stoker's fate is directly connected to his hands, not only by relaying the fact that the stoker puts his hands in his pockets, but also that it is a conscious act, and that there is a causal connection—because he will be unemployed, he hides "im Vollbewußtsein dessen" his unemployed hands in his pockets.¹⁹ The emphasis on the consciousness of the movement, even specified as the "full," complete consciousness, shows the overdetermined nature that the stoker's hands are assigned by their observer. The stoker's job also constitutes his entire identity within the narrative: We never learn a name, but instead the stoker is referred to by his profession of "stoker" throughout. Not only does his name reduce him to his function of providing manual labor, but through the close-ups on his hands the narrative perspective mimics how his entire person is quickly reduced to the labor power that he provides.

The stoker is defined as a worker, and the ship as a workspace: "'Sie sind Schiffsheizer!' rief Karl freudig, . . . 'Gerade vor der Kammer, wo ich mit den Slowacken geschlafen habe, war eine Luke angebracht, durch die man in den Maschinenraum sehen konnte'" (11). His profession is directly connected to the engine and the machine room, and the stoker appears as a personification of labor power, as a veritable "human motor."²⁰ The very profession of the "Schiffsheizer",

whose place of work is the ship's machine room, is historically charged; the steam engine is a synecdoche for industrial work since it is, as the most influential technical innovation, directly linked to the origins of industrialization, the emergence of a modern working class, and the changes in status of physical, manual labor. The occupation of stoker is thus highly significant—it is the name not just of the main character but also of the novel's first chapter and eventually, in 1913, of the separate publication "Der Heizer. Ein Fragment." Kafka considered the Heizer chapter as containing the conflict of *Der Verschollene* in its purest state²¹ and the only part worth publishing.

The setting of "Der Heizer" on a state-of-the-art steamship underlines the Heizer's association with the steam engine, and thus presents a motorized²² microcosm of mechanical labor.²³ The ship also reflects the separation between the working class and the professional class in its set-up because it contains the notion of a class division, literally, into degrees of travel comfort. The ship itself is a hybrid space in terms of work and social hierarchies, containing the factory-like space of the Maschinenraum, as well as office spaces, such as the captain's "Bureau" (17). The ship also functions as a hybrid space between old and new social orders, serving as a transition between the old world and the new, between Karl's old and new status. The ship contains the notion of societal change and in its very setting is the ideal vehicle for depicting Karl's confusion with the various changes that he encounters. (The fact that the chapter was written a few months after a most spectacular sinking of such a ship, the Titanic, creates an additional element of doom and a critical view of the technical innovations of modernity.)

The stoker's fists and the clashing views of the worker as individual and as replaceable part of a machine

The stoker's connection with the machine room indicates how much he is identified as a person by his profession and function on the ship, and this importance creates a stark contrast with his actual status on the ship. This contrast is especially apparent in his being easily replaceable, allegedly fired on a whim by the head engineer. While his job means everything to him, to the superiors on the ship he is reduced to his function of providing manual labor. Already in the first images, the narrative perspective mimics such a reduction by zooming in on his working hands. They are metonymical in nature: The steady, rhythmic movement that his hands are conditioned to execute underlines how much his entire body, and being, is defined by his work. The stoker's work takes over all aspects of his life, yet as an individual worker he is not considered significant to the work that he performs.

This tension implies an inherent imbalance. The replacement affects him in a direct, physical way, as his hands show in their habitual movement and the subsequent immobilization and disappearance of the hands in the pockets. However, the stoker can apparently be replaced without consequence for the ship crew. The stoker's existence as disposable, exchangeable worker is associated with his hands, including their movements and the halt of these movements. His profession defines him to the point that it constitutes his identity, and the loss of

the position threatens him existentially. The disposable and substitutable nature of his job becomes even more apparent when the stoker suggests that Karl, a random stranger without any apparent qualification, could easily take over, when he tells him about the impending or feared loss of the job. Yet, the loss of this very job has the stoker in a state of existential despair. A tension between the stoker's desperation in regard to the loss of the job, and his actual importance on the ship is apparent, and the two different views of the stoker—and of the worker—are left unresolved.

It is especially the stoker's fist that appears as a sign of this tension. When the stoker explains the background of the situation, the reader is directed to follow his hands' movements, which are described, much more explicitly than in the example above, in the context of the threat of his position and livelihood. Directing his anger against the head engineer, he becomes more and more excited:

Er heißt Schubal. ... Und dieser Lumpenhund schindet uns Deutsche auf einem deutschen Schiff! Glauben Sie nicht," -- ihm ging die Luft aus, er fackelte mit der Hand -- "daß ich klage, um zu klagen. Ich weiß, daß Sie keinen Einfluß haben und selbst ein armes Bürschchen sind. Aber es ist zu arg!" Und er schlug auf den Tisch mehrmals mit der Faust und ließ kein Auge von ihr, während er schlug. (13)

It is stressed that the slamming of the fist occurs repeatedly ("mehrmals"), creating an additional emphasis just like in the previous example. This already vigorous image is further reinforced by the careful description of the stoker's watching of his own hand. Especially the phrasing "er ließ kein Auge von ihr" suggests a significance to the fist that goes beyond the expression of anger, as if he

were almost actively identifying with the fist, and the fist represented, or contained, his core issue.

Karl's observation of the stoker's observation of the fist is a reflection of the stoker's agency. The hand imitates his agitated speech by waving ("fackelte mir der Hand") but does so when his breath and words fail him; the fist is the only action that is available to him and therefore also represents his lack of agency. He seems condemned to just watch it, so that there is a passive component in addition to the action of clenching the fist. The stoker's lack of agency is also directed back to Karl, whom the stoker calls "armes Bürschchen" after pointing to Karl's own lack of influence.

Nevertheless, Karl, who considers the matter "eine Sache der Gerechtigkeit," is determined to act on the stoker's behalf, and in his youthful enthusiasm for social justice wants to help the stoker in his fight against the accusations of his antagonist, the head engineer Schubal. Karl accompanies the stoker to the captain's office, where Schubal eventually joins them. The description of the encounter displays the same specific focus on the stoker's fist, marking its importance for the stoker's entire social and class identity even more explicitly:

Draußen stand in einem alten Kaiserrock ein Mann von mittleren Proportionen, seinem Aussehen nach nicht eigentlich zur Arbeit an den Maschinen geeignet, und war doch -- Schubal. Wenn es Karl nicht an aller Augen erkannt hätte, . . . er hätte es zu seinem Schrecken am Heizer sehen müssen, der die Fäuste an den gestrafften Armen so ballte, als sei diese Ballung das Wichtigste an ihm, dem er alles, was er an Leben habe, zu opfern bereit sei. Da steckte jetzt alle seine Kraft, auch die, welche ihn überhaupt aufrecht erhielt (31).

The description of the gesture of the fist focuses on its strength. The muscles of the arm are contracted, and the movement of clenching the fist is described by using both the according verb and noun in one sentence (“ballte,” “Ballung”). The choice of the word “Ballung” itself contains the moment of intensification because in addition to the meaning of clenching it also contains the meaning of concentration. The “Ballung” is experienced as “das Wichtigste an ihm,” worth sacrificing “alles, was er an Leben habe,” and containing “alle seine Kraft.” The clenched fist contains the essence of the Heizer’s being and his condensed strength, while it is the organ that provides the labor power. The fist contains both the effort and the desperation of his situation.

The fist in which the stoker’s strength and power culminates is also opposed to the description of Schubal, a man of medium proportions who does not appear to be strong enough to operate heavy machinery. The description of the lack of strength is opposed to the “Kraft” that is so strikingly apparent in the image of the stoker’s fist. Physical strength and status are in inverse proportions here, something that confuses Karl, who seems to think that physical strength would be a reliable indicator of a person’s status within the work hierarchy.²⁴

Trying to read and interpret the stoker’s gestures serves as an attempt to gain insight into a confusing and unclear situation. The hands, rather than clarifying the situation, contain and condense the confusion themselves. The explanation that the stoker’s fist would have served to identify Schubal appears within a

hypothetical situation only, and is thus explicitly introduced as unnecessary to actually identifying him, creating a moment of confusion. This confusion becomes stronger the more information is added: The narrator not only describes the hands but in a sequence of separate steps emphasizes their special significance, yet without making it explicit. Thus, this moment of double emphasis creates redundancy rather than explaining the gesture, creating a semiotic excess that remains unresolved. There is, for example, no indication that the fist carries strong implications as a universal gesture of strength and power, especially as a trope specific to work imagery, as I will show later in this section. Rather, Karl contemplates the stoker's fist as if he is seeing a clenched fist for the first time. Therefore, all his attempts to clarify instead show his inability to make sense of the situation.²⁵

What remains equally unclear is an ambiguity in the narrative perspective regarding the close-ups on the hand and the following reiterations, as well as the interpretations themselves. It is never revealed which narrative instance makes these judgements about the significance of the stoker's fist, and how conscious the respective characters are of these intentions or the thoughts about them. It remains unclear whether the reader has access to the stoker's thoughts, Karl's thoughts about the stoker, or the narrator's thoughts about Karl's thoughts, and there is no mechanism in place that helps determine whether any of the assumptions about any of the characters are valid.²⁶ This is of course true for much of Kafka's narration, but it is particularly crucial to take into account here because it exemplifies Karl's attempt to make sense of the gesture within a series of highly

questionable premises. Therefore, the image creates more confusion than clarity in the power dynamics and social hierarchies that are at play on the ship and in the office.

Karl's reading and misreading of hands

The focus on gestures and their importance shows Karl's difficulty of grasping any meaning in interpreting them or even transforming them into action and remains a characteristic feature throughout; the entire negotiation in the captain's office is, from this perspective, carried out through gestures and hand movements. Initially, the negotiation on the stoker's behalf seem promising, such as when the stoker is prompted to provide his papers and obliges in a speedy manner, made explicit through the precise grip for the documents: "Glücklicherweise zeigte sich bei dieser Gelegenheit, daß der Heizer schon viel in der Welt herumgekommen war. Musterhaft ruhig nahm er aus seinem Köfferchen mit dem ersten Griff ein Bündelchen Papiere" (24). Later, when the situation deteriorates, the lack of precision is again illustrated through hands: "Aber alles mahnte zur Eile, zur Deutlichkeit, zu ganz genauer Darstellung; aber was tat der Heizer? Er redete sich allerdings in Schweiß, die Papiere auf dem Fenster konnte er längst mit seinen zitternden Händen nicht mehr halten" (27). Karl's own gestures adapt to the circumstances and are explained as well, explicitly referring to it as a "Zeichen": Karl "schlug die Hände an die Hosennaht, zum Zeichen des Endes jeder Hoffnung" (29).

The attention to signs even extends beyond the attempt to simply read manual gestures. When Karl believes that the negotiation is turning out in the stoker's favor, it is not only the gesture that is promising, but even the tone of the voice is expressed in an image that evokes physical strength executed by a firm grip: "Er streckte nämlich die Hand aus und rief zum Heizer: 'Kommen Sie her!' mit einer Stimme, fest, um mit einem Hammer darauf zu schlagen" (23). Accordingly, when Karl is disappointed with the development in the captain's office, he concludes: "Alles war klar und wurde ja auch von Schubal wider Willen so dargeboten, aber den Herren mußte man es anders, noch handgreiflicher zeigen. Sie brauchten Aufrüttelung" (35).

Karl is so deeply confused by the situation and the social dynamics that he does not seem to differentiate between the literal and figurative levels, and this discrepancy between significance attributed to the hands and actual insight into any meaning reinforces this confusion. What people are literally holding in their hands is expected to be of great significance, and during the "trial" of the stoker the text goes to great length to describe various individuals holding anachronistic insignia of power without any concrete function except for the symbolism that Karl attributes to them: "Der eine lehnte neben dem Fenster, trug auch die Schiffsuniform und spielte mit dem Griff des Degens. Derjenige, mit dem er sprach . . . war in Civil und hatte ein dünnes Bambusstockchen, das, da er beide Hände an den Hüften festhielt, auch wie ein Degen abstand" (20-21).

This attempt to read the situation and hold on to any potential symbol of

power shows the disorientation, and, as in the encounter with the head engineer, in this image it becomes clear that the disorientation is related to a certain configuration of power structures that Karl does not fully understand. He senses the importance of the symbols of power, but fails to use them to his advantage. The civil clothes of the man (that will turn out to be the uncle) are contrasted with the uniform of the other, and likewise, their tools seem to convey different concepts of power.²⁷ Just like the social hierarchies, these objects are potentially confusing, alluded to by Karl's description of the head engineer's physical appearance, such as his clothes and stature, that distinguish him from the heavily built stoker.

Karl's confusion about holding objects also affects his own gestures, as in the following example where Karl thinks that the negotiation seems to be going well: "Wie freute sich Karl am verlassenen Schreibtisch des Oberkassiers, wo er eine Briefwage immer wieder niederdrückte vor lauter Vergnügen" (25). The fact that we don't know exactly whose perspective is represented in this passage complicates any translation into meaning and increases any potential confusion. Is Karl really happy when he presses down on the scale? Or is he mistaken for happy by a narrator more naive than he is? Is it a misinterpretation? Does he confuse cause and effect?

However one might answer these questions, the main effect of this narrative perspective is that even statements that may seem clear are corrupted by this dynamic of confusingly different perspectives and views.²⁸ In fact, it may be Karl's inability to understand hand clues that got him into his current situation in the first

place. As he is waiting in the captains office, his prior seduction by the family maid in Prague and the events that led to it are remembered by Karl as a series of hand observations and literal manipulations. Karl remembers this episode during the negotiation in the captains office:

Manchmal hielt sie die Augen *mit der Hand verdeckt*, dann drang keine Anrede zu ihr. . . Manchmal schloß sie die Küchentüre, wenn Karl eingetreten war, und *behielt die Klinke solange in der Hand* bis er wegzugehn verlangte. Manchmal holte sie Sachen, die er gar nicht haben wollte, und *drückte sie ihm schweigend in die Hände*. Einmal aber sagte sie "Karl!" und *führte ihn*, der noch über die unerwartete Ansprache staunte, unter Grimassen seufzend in ihr Zimmerchen, das sie zusperrte. *Würgend* umarmte sie seinen Hals und während sie ihn bat sie zu entkleiden, entkleidete sie in Wirklichkeit ihn und legte ihn in ihr Bett, als wolle sie ihn von jetzt niemandem mehr lassen und ihn *streicheln* und pflegen bis zum Ende der Welt. . . . Dann legte sie sich auch zu ihm und . . . suchte *mit der Hand*, so widerlich daß Karl Kopf und Hals aus den Kissen heraus schüttelte, zwischen seinen Beinen. (41-43)²⁹

From this story at the origin of Karl's ordeal, Karl remains subjected to such manipulations up to the end of the novel fragment.

The play with literal and figurative meaning of holding objects and manipulating people remains crucial throughout and beyond the chapter. For instance, Karl miscalculates the importance of the umbrella greatly when he abandons and sacrifices the suitcase while trying to retrieve the umbrella. Even when he has forgotten about the umbrella and realizes the inevitable loss of the suitcase, he regrets , in his fixation on dagger/stick/umbrella-shaped objects,³⁰ the loss of another item and more specifically, he regrets not having it "bei der Hand":

Jetzt hätte er aber die Wurst gern bei der Hand gehabt, um sie dem Heizer zu verehren. Denn solche Leute sind leicht gewonnen wenn man ihnen

irgendeine Kleinigkeit zusteckt, das wußte Karl noch von seinem Vater her, welcher durch Cigarrenverteilung alle die niedrigeren Angestellten gewann, mit denen er geschäftlich zu tun hatte (15).

The sausage, according to Karl's logic, would have helped him assert a certain status, prefigured by the cigars that the father used to distribute to affirm his own status within the social hierarchy. This sausage symbolism reflects the absurdity of taking the insignia of power literally, but it also shows that Karl remains caught in this way of thinking, and caught in a narrative mode describing social situations and work hierarchies in actual acts of holding or not holding specific items. The very same sausage is singled out again later when, after having gotten the suitcase back,³¹ it is taken again back out of his hand and is to his distress literally and extensively handled ("behandeln") by his travel companion, "mit seinem dolchartigen Messer" (142). There, too, the power struggle is experienced by Karl as a childish game about who gets to handle, hold and carry the sausage and the resurfaced suitcase.³² This literal understanding disguises Karl's real predicament, which here too is conveyed in terms of holding symbolic items without a deeper understanding of the situation.

Considering how important it seems throughout the entire novel to seize, grasp, and hold the right objects and symbols of power, the famous image at the beginning of the novel, that of the Statue of Liberty holding not a torch but a sword, can be seen as programmatic not only for the chapter but the entire novel and its depiction of power dynamics. The entire novel consists of examining a series of smaller and larger social constellations, and already the first sentence depicts an

impressive accumulation of problematic power dynamics:

Als der sechzehnjährige Karl Roßmann, der von seinen armen Eltern nach Amerika geschickt worden war, weil ihn ein Dienstmädchen verführt und ein Kind von ihm bekommen hatte, in dem schon langsam gewordenen Schiff in den Hafen von New York einfuhr, erblickte er die schon längst beobachtete Statue der Freiheitsgöttin wie in einem plötzlich stärker gewordenen Sonnenlicht. (7)

The sentence contains a generational conflict, a class struggle, and a gender struggle.³³ Karl is at the center of each of these struggles, and his position is highly ambivalent in each of these constellations.³⁴ The opening sentence defines him as both son (of his parents) and father (of an illegitimate child), abandoned by his family and abandoning his infant son. “Seduction” implies a certain ambivalence in the voluntariness of his participation, confirmed in the later recapitulation of the events. The seductress is an employee, which complicates the matter significantly and emphasizes Karl’s issue with social structures. Rather, Karl is caught amidst all these conflicts without “grasping” his own position (“Stellung begreifen”).

After all these conflicts and Karl’s varying position in them in the first sentence, the image Karl sees in the next sentence almost comes as no surprise: “Ihr Arm mit dem Schwert ragte wie neuerdings empor, und um ihre Gestalt wehten die freien Lüfte” (7). The statue is an embodiment and prefiguration of the struggles to come, a vehicle for showing us a confused protagonist who senses and experiences conflicts and tensions but can’t quite put them together and remains caught in the middle. It is a vision that Karl has from a place of disorientation in regard to power structures and social hierarchies, on the hybrid space of the ship that has him in a

transition between old and new world. The image is also a prefiguration of the events to come, of Karl's struggle with finding his place in the social constellations around him that remain deeply unstable. In a way, all of these themes are contained in the first sentence and culminate in the image of the statue holding the sword.

The descriptions of the Heizer's fist can be seen as complementary to this first image—just before he forms his fist for the first time, it is specified in the rather unusual phrasing that he makes the flickering movements of a burning torch (“fackelte mit der Hand” [13]), establishing a correspondence between the missing torch in the first image and the images of the stoker's struggles. A variation of the image is featured again in a later chapter, when work conditions and striking construction workers are discussed and where hands holding candelabras are symbolic of the collision between old and new social orders.³⁵ Karl conjures up this multilayered image, which like so many of the other hand images is a complicated sign that is an expression of a rather confused state, conveying a tension in the middle of which Karl remains caught.

The fact that the image contains the main struggles of the novel and is also mirrored in later passages emphasizes its importance for the novel. Everything that follows occurs under this banner of the raised hand, and America will be presented through the same gaze that conjures up this image.

The hand as a metonymy for work

The hand images in “Der Heizer” are emphatically defined as observations, spectacles, signs. This is true for Karl’s observations of the stoker’s fists, and also of the statue of liberty, where the visual effect is emphasized in cinematic fashion: The spotlight is on the statue, “wie in einem plötzlich stärker gewordenen Sonnenlicht,” followed by the close-up on the arm holding the sword. In their function as images, the hand observations can be connected to the hand as an figure of work, especially in imagery associated with workers movements. In general, the hand has a long tradition of being associated with the human ability to work and therefore has a particularly strong potential to metonymically represent issues associated with work.³⁶ Hands define humans as the working creature, as “homo faber,” linking the very nature of humanity to the ability to work and create. In German, this is also reflected within the language itself of craft as “Handwerk,” and, as in English and other languages, also through the Latin root “manus” (as, for instance, in “manufacture”).

In an article on the origins of hand imagery in worker movements, Gottfried Korff describes how Renaissance imagery—most famously represented by Michelangelo’s Sixtine Chapel detail of the divine and human fingers touching—and industrial allegory draw on the hand as a trope for human work.³⁷ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, industrial allegory was focused on a “bourgeois’ view of work as a sign of goal-oriented, planned achievement and success in the world, with the hand depicted as a tool that creates new tools and hence the organ that makes

humanity the crowning work of creation.”³⁸ In the nineteenth century, “industrial iconography usually completed the hand image with a tool, especially a hammer or wrench, not only as a natural extension of the arm and hand, but also as a sign of capitalist ownership of the means of production.”³⁹

As manual labor, and its social status, changed, so did its imagery; this changed the significance of hand imagery from a trope of agency and productivity into a trope of disenfranchisement and rebellion. The hand thus became “a central symbol of early workers' organizations,” as Korff describes: “Accentuated in frontal or side views, the power and determination of the grasping hand and muscular arm became a stock element of socialist iconography. Several agitational gestures adopted by the social movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have drawn from the general hand metaphor.”⁴⁰ Relevant here are especially the gestures of the clasped hands and the clenched fist.

The clasped hands were “particularly suited to the early workers' movement both because they were a sign of binding loyalty to a social-political cause,” coming to signify “solidarity, mutual support, and equality.”⁴¹ Clasped hands were an illustration of “fraternité” during the French Revolution and became the official symbol of a number of worker organizations throughout Europe. In Germany, the image was used for example by the Arbeiter-Verbrüderung, in 1850. While the origins of the clasped hands included religious notions of brotherly love, such “religious connotations were de-emphasized by adding an upwardly pointing sword, signifying energy, strength, and political will.”⁴²

The clenched fist “first became a spontaneous gesture of protest, discontent, and readiness to fight during the strike wave of the 1880s.”⁴³ It “was quickly incorporated into the rhetoric of strikes and protests, often extending into threats of violence through the grasping of stones ready to be thrown”⁴⁴ and the gesture was, according to Korff, taken over by workers organizations around 1900.

The images in “Der Heizer” should be read together with such hand imagery of workers’ movements and political drawings in mind, I would argue, and as a deliberate reference. In his capacity as an employee of the Accident-Workmen insurance, Kafka was not only an expert in the challenges and dangers of industrial work, as I will show in the next chapter, he was also certainly familiar with various publications of workers’ unions and their illustrations. The sword-holding hands, the stoker’s fists, and the initially quoted interlaced hands of Karl and the stoker all recall imagery of the workers’ movements.⁴⁵

The use of hand imagery as an additional layer of interpretation

The allusions to such hand imagery show the conscious inclusion of contemporary issues, but they have another important function within the structure of the text: Taking up such a charged trope also adds an additional layer to the stylized overdetermination of the hand images, just like the consistent focus on repetitive hand movements, through close-ups, literalizations, and the narrator’s double and triple descriptions and attempts at interpretations.⁴⁶ In addition to

creating an excess and overdetermination of the figure, it also emphasizes the simultaneous inability to read and understand it: The use of a rather conventional figure such as a clenched fist adds to the redundancy that is created. The overdetermined hand imagery together with the somewhat clumsy, repetitive attempts to assign meaning to them draws attention to a familiar figure while at the same time defamiliarizing it, creating an atmosphere of alienation that prevents Karl from correctly reading the hand signs.

Through this layering of meaning, the resistance to being decipherable, the hands are inherently ambiguous. Rather than functioning as desperately needed signs and signals for understanding the social order, an irreconcilable tension of world views is inherent in the hand observations. As such, they contain the simultaneous but conflicting views of the stoker as an individual subject and of the stoker in the captain's office, as that of a replaceable worker. It is this discrepancy that confuses Karl but that he nevertheless is shown to sense in the stoker's fist that seems to contain his entire being. This tension is vital to understanding the significance of the stoker's hands to Karl, and of the figure of the hand for the novel. The stark contrast between the view of the worker as a replaceable object and his perception as an individual informs the scene where Karl bids the stoker farewell, which I have partly quoted in the beginning and to which I come back here because it can only be fully understood by including the focus of the hand throughout the chapter:

"Dir ist ja unrecht geschehen, wie keinem auf dem Schiff, das weiß ich ganz genau." Und Karl zog seine Finger hin und her zwischen den Fingern des

Heizers, der mit glänzenden Augen ringsumher schaute, als widerfahre ihm eine Wonne, die ihm aber niemand verübeln möge.

"Du mußt dich aber zur Wehr setzen, ja und nein sagen, sonst haben doch die Leute keine Ahnung von der Wahrheit. Du mußt mir versprechen, daß du mir folgen wirst, denn ich selbst, das fürchte ich mit vielem Grund, werde dir gar nicht mehr helfen können." Und nun weinte Karl, während er die Hand des Heizers küßte, und nahm die rissige, fast leblose Hand und drückte sie an seine Wangen, wie einen Schatz, auf den man verzichten muß. -- Da war aber auch schon der Onkel Senator an seiner Seite und zog ihn, wenn auch nur mit dem leichtesten Zwange, fort. (49-50)

The hand unites the clashing views of the Heizer in this bizzare image. The replaceable, reified nature of the working individual is captured in the description of the hand as "fast leblos", which is a strong image of the worker, and his hand, as objectified part, or inanimate object. The hand is "almost" literally reified, no longer part of a living organism, but an objectified and alienated limb that is a metonymy of his role as a replaceable part of the machinery of the ship.

This depiction of the objectified hand clashes with the view of the stoker as an individual and as someone with a personal relationship to Karl. The anonymity of the lifeless hand meets the intimacy of the tenderness and concern that Karl expresses by linking his fingers with the stoker's, kissing the hand, and ultimately pressing the hand on his cheek "wie einen Schatz, auf den man verzichten muß." The stoker himself, who is otherwise not depicted as particularly sensitive, has tears in his eyes, and is literally as well as figuratively touched by the exchange; "eine Wonne, die ihm aber niemand verübeln möge," implies that he is neither used to nor believes himself entitled to such treatment. The "Wonne" is the "bliss" of temporarily being perceived as an individual, unique human being in a universe

where he is disposable and easily replaced, using the hand for contact, affection, or communication. Karl's gesture can even be seen as an anachronistic and obsolete reminder of a bygone era, the brotherly hand, interlaced in solidarity.

The passage however also contains a strong notion of the gesture being overly intimate and hence inappropriate, pointing to Karl's inability to understand his own position. The tenderness and intimacy of playing with the stoker's fingers in this all too public realm stands in contrast to the fact that the stoker is a virtual stranger to Karl. It is not only perceived as unexpected by the stoker, but also by the uncle who drags Karl away with the explicit order to understand his own position: "‘Der Heizer scheint dich bezaubert zu haben’ sagte er und sah verständnisinnig über Karls Kopf zum Kapitän hin. ‘Du hast dich verlassen gefühlt, da hast du den Heizer gefunden und bist ihm jetzt dankbar, das ist ja ganz löblich. Treibe das aber, schon mir zuliebe, nicht zu weit und lerne deine Stellung begreifen’" (50).

The uncle points out that the Heizer's role is the function that he has for Karl. The stoker is a pawn in Karl's struggle to read and misread the social dynamics around him and to understand his own role. Karl is not only unable to help his friend, but his own relationship to the stoker ultimately mimics the dynamics of disposal and replacement. It is in fact Karl who immediately attempts to replace the stoker by filling the vacancy as he looks back at the ship when leaving the harbor together with his uncle:

Alle drei Fenster waren mit Zeugen Schubals besetzt, welche freundschaftlich

grüßten und winkten, sogar der Onkel dankte und ein Matrose machte das Kunststück, ohne eigentlich das gleichmäßige Rudern zu unterbrechen eine Kußhand hinaufzuschicken. Es war wirklich als gebe es keinen Heizer mehr. Karl faßte den Onkel, mit dessen Knien sich die seinen fast berührten, genauer ins Auge und es kamen ihm Zweifel, ob dieser Mann ihm jemals den Heizer werde ersetzen können (53).

As he looks back, there is no trace of the stoker, who completely disappears: “Es war wirklich als gebe es keinen Heizer mehr.” The Heizer and his lifeless hand are replaced by Schubal’s witnesses and their waving hands, and by the “Matrose” with his “Kußhand,” a virtual reversal of Karl kissing the stoker’s hand. As soon as the stoker no longer fulfills his role to Karl, and his narrative role within the text, the stoker as a character is left behind on the ship, terminated as the novel’s near-protagonist, a disposable prop for the novel and the reader just as much as for Karl and the ship crew.

The focus on hands in contexts of labor continues throughout the novel in a way that goes beyond its figurative value by directly showing hands at work.

2. “Mit starken taktmäßigen Griffen”: The hand as trope of the worker’s body subjected to work rhythm

In addition to imagery such as the stoker’s fist, stick and dagger, and lady liberty’s sword, *Der Verschollene* shows us hands at work, often in the proximity of

machines. Hands are repeatedly depicted as being subjected to the unnatural speed and rhythm of the machines. The hand as a trope for objectification is itself shown to be literally objectified in the recurring description of hand movements that follow a forced, unnatural, inhuman rhythm. The hand is a site where the human body and the larger machinery of industrial production meet, and where the clash between the human individual and the human as part of the machine occurs. America is presented as a space of maximal “hand efficiency” that is in line with scientific studies of the best use of the human body and the human hand for industrial production, and as such is a commentary on contemporaneous production methods, as I will show in this section. But the importance of hands in Karl’s America is not limited to actual work contexts; the hand is the main tool for economic and social success throughout the text, emphasizing the pervasiveness of the imperative for maximum efficiency and profitability. Here, too, the hand represents the tension between the human as individual and as part of a larger collective, ranging from the hand as part of the human body subjected to the rhythm of machines to the hand as signifier of the threat to (and defense of) the subject’s boundaries and autonomy.

Hands in the mechanized workplace

Implicit effects of mechanization are already present in the initial example of the stoker closing and opening the suitcase in a mechanical, almost robotic fashion, as if he is so used to performing a repetitive movement that it occurs automatically

and involuntarily. Before Karl experiences hands at work more directly, he witnesses hand movements from the position of observer, as in the case of the stoker, or, also in “Der Heizer,” while looking out of the window of the captain’s office amidst the negotiation, when he catches his second glimpse of “Amerika”:

kleine Motorboote, die Karl jetzt, wenn er Zeit gehabt hätte, genau hätte ansehen können, rauschten nach den Zuckungen der Hände eines am Steuer aufrecht stehenden Mannes schnurgrade dahin; eigentümliche Schwimmkörper tauchten hie und da selbständig aus dem ruhelosen Wasser, wurden gleich wieder überschwemmt und versanken vor dem erstaunten Blick; Boote der Ozeandampfer wurden von heiß arbeitenden Matrosen vorwärtsgerudert und waren voll von Passagieren, die darin, so wie man sie hineingezwängt hatte, still und erwartungsvoll saßen, wenn es auch manche nicht unterlassen konnten, die Köpfe nach den wechselnden Szenerien zu drehen. Eine Bewegung ohne Ende, eine Unruhe, übertragen von dem unruhigen Element auf die hilflosen Menschen und ihre Werke! (26-27)

At first sight, it seems that man, or more specifically, the “Zuckungen der Hände eines am Steuer aufrecht stehenden Mannes,” are in control of the machine, and the man’s posture as well as the ship’s movements support a certain illusion of control (“aufrecht” and “schnurgrade”). But Karl’s initial impression may not be so accurate; after all, the motorized ships are introduced as “kleine Motorboote, die Karl jetzt, wenn er Zeit gehabt hätte, genau hätte ansehen können”—Karl admits that he doesn’t have enough time to watch them carefully, and this already raises questions about the reliability and accuracy of his assessment of who is in control. A reversal of agency of the human hand as controlled rather than controlling becomes increasingly apparent. Undefined “Schwimmkörper” move independently, presumably independently from human control (“selbständig”), and he observes rowing personnel and squeezed in passengers that inadvertently move their heads

to the “wechselnden Szenarien.” Finally, the “Zuckungen der Hände” turn out to be an inadvertent, involuntary twitching motion of the hands, as the gradual shift of control between human and the motion of the boats in the water is reversed: “Eine Bewegung ohne Ende, eine Unruhe, übertragen von dem unruhigen Element auf die hilflosen Menschen und ihre Werke!” The hand is neither in control of the ship nor of its own movement. To the contrary, it is controlled by a larger commotion, the unruly element water being disturbed by the man-made traffic. In adapting their own motion to the fast-paced movements of the surroundings, the “helpless human’s” twitching hand is subjected to the rhythm of the traffic. The very notion of “twitching” supports the idea of at least partially unautonomous motion, as is the fact that man and his works are called “helpless.” The context of the ocean is thus a continuation of the factory-like setting on the ship, both in the Heizraum inhabited by the Heizer and the captain’s office, where mechanization is perceived as a threat that can, with the push of a button, turn everybody against the stoker. Even where the boats are not motorized, the creation of energy evokes the heat of an engine: “heiss arbeitend” takes up the heat-generating “Heizer” element, provided by “Matrosen” that are forced into a tight space.

When Karl encounters a rhythmically twitching hand in the next chapter, while visiting his uncle’s company, the human hand appears more directly as an object, an accessory within the mechanized workspace rather than an individual exerting its mastery over it. The mechanism here is likewise the technical apparatus as well as a larger capitalist “machinery,” the description of which introduces and dominates the scene. The portrayal of the overwhelming extent of

the uncle's business and of the state-of-the-art electrified telecommunication center culminates in the description of a single employee's fingers:

Das Geschäft bestand nämlich in einem Zwischenhandel, der aber die Waren nicht etwa von den Producenten zu den Konsumenten oder vielleicht zu den Händlern vermittelte, sondern welcher die Vermittlung aller Waren und Urprodukte für die großen Fabrikskartelle und zwischen ihnen besorgte. Es war daher ein Geschäft, welches in einem Käufe, Lagerungen, Transporte und Verkäufe riesenhaften Umfangs umfaßte und ganz genaue unaufhörliche telephonische und telegraphische Verbindungen mit den Klienten unterhalten mußte. Der Saal der Telegraphen war nicht kleiner, sondern größer als das Telegraphenamt der Vaterstadt, durch das Karl einmal an der Hand eines dort bekannten Mitschülers gegangen war. Im Saal der Telephone giengen wohin man schaute die Türen der Telephonzellen auf und zu und das Läuten war sinnverwirrend. Der Onkel öffnete die nächste dieser Türen und man sah dort im sprühenden elektrischen Licht einen Angestellten gleichgültig gegen jedes Geräusch der Türe, den Kopf eingespannt in ein Stahlband, das ihm die Hörmuscheln an die Ohren drückte. Der rechte Arm lag auf einem Tischchen, als wäre er besonders schwer und nur die Finger, welche den Bleistift hielten, zuckten unmenschlich gleichmäßig und rasch (65–66).

The human body, and specifically the human hand, is subjected to the electrified rhythm. Like the hands that steered the motor boat, the telecommunicator's fingers are twitching ("zuckten"), again emphasizing the involuntary element, the hand behaving after the impulses transmitted by the machine. In contrast to the twitching finger, the arm is motionless, "als wäre er besonders schwer", recalling the almost-dead hand of the stoker. Here, it is not a series of images that leads to a view of "die hilflosen Menschen und ihre Werke," but the hand movement is declared "unmenschlich"; specifically, the regular and fast movement ("gleichmäßig und rasch") is preceded by the attribute "inhuman." This rhythmical movement evokes a system of "Taktarbeit", or assembly line

work—and while no assembly line is shown, the scene is framed by the background of the uncle's all-encompassing network of factories, "die großen Fabrikkartelle." The telecommunications have to be precise and are virtually endless ("ganz genaue unaufhörliche telephonische und telegraphische Verbindungen"), just as one would imagine the work within the factories themselves that are in communication with one another here.

The disorientation caused by these new surroundings appears here in an almost tangible way. The large size of the offices and the commotion are called "sinnverwirrend." Confusion of the sense of vision is illustrated by the description of bright lights that the employee is sitting under ("im sprühenden elektrischen Licht"), where the light is depicted as a material, liquid substance. The present impression is interrupted by a flashback to Karl's hometown's "Telegraphenamt," conjuring up the comforting sensation of holding his friend's hand while also reinforcing Karl's past of being led by others. As in the previous example, Karl describes a situation in some detail but without understanding his own position.

While these early scenes show Karl as an observer trying to make sense of what he sees, he is soon enough himself subjected to the faster pace and rhythm. While staying with his uncle, he generally becomes familiar with the importance of increased tempo:

Karl sah wohl ein daß zur Aneignung des Englischen keine Eile groß genug sei und daß er hier außerdem die beste Gelegenheit habe seinem Onkel eine außerordentliche Freude durch rasche Fortschritte zu machen. . . . Das erste amerikanische Gedicht, die Darstellung einer Feuersbrunst, das Karl seinem Onkel an einem Abend recitieren konnte, machte diesen tiefernst vor

Zufriedenheit. Sie standen damals beide an einem Fenster in Karls Zimmer, der Onkel sah hinaus, wo alle Helligkeit des Himmels schon vergangen war und schlug im Mitgefühl der Verse langsam und gleichmäßig in die Hände, während Karl aufrecht neben ihm stand und mit starren Augen das schwierige Gedicht sich entrang. (61-62)

Learning English can't happen fast enough ("keine Eile groß genug") and progress has to be made as quickly as possible in order to please the uncle. The emphasis on pace manifests itself in the importance of the rhythm and meter of the poem. The pace may seem reasonable to Karl, even slow and steady, but the next sentence makes clear that it is unnatural, too fast and rigid for Karl. He stands in a rigid position, eyes frozen, and the recital is described as difficult. The uncle's clapping of the hands is initially described as accompanying Karl, but Karl has difficulty following the rhythm, and his recital is described as laboring, evoking a controlling rather than supportive function of the clapping, like a foreman supervising the work. As in the previous examples, a factory-like setting is recalled indirectly, as the poem Karl recites may refer to a recent fire in a sweatshop setting.⁴⁷ The clapping hands are thus layered with the inhuman element, a tragedy, a work accident, emphasized by the fact that the uncle averts his gaze. The combination of the figure of hands and the fast-paced tempo in the clapping hands reappears over the course of the novel: The brutal, somewhat involuntary boxing matches in the cramped hotel dormitory, a nightly ritual among the hotel employees, are accompanied by "rythmisches Händeklatschen" (217). A political rally, too, contains this somewhat inhuman, specifically machine-like, element: "Auf den Balkonen, die von Parteigängern des Kandidaten besetzt waren, fiel man mit in

das Singen seines Namens ein und ließ die weit über das Gelände vorgestreckten Hände maschinenmäßig klatschen" (326-326).

Here, Karl's subjection to an "inhuman" rhythm occurs within the bourgeois practice of reciting a poem, and the working class tragedy of the sweatshop fire content is secondary to the recital. However, in his job as an elevator boy, Karl eventually experiences a direct instance of his own hands as objectified, subjected to the speed of a conveyor-belt-like contraption and the maximum efficiency that it demands, modified from the horizontal to the vertical but with equal emphasis on fast pace and accelerated, regular hand movements:

Oft gab es trotz der vielen Aufzüge, besonders nach Schluß der Teater oder nach Ankunft bestimmter Expreszüge, ein solches Gedränge, daß er, kaum daß die Gäste oben entlassen waren, wieder hinunterrasen mußte, um die dort Wartenden aufzunehmen. Er hatte auch die Möglichkeit, durch Ziehen an einem durch den Aufzugskasten hindurchgehenden Drahtseil, die gewöhnliche Schnelligkeit zu steigern, allerdings war dies durch die Aufzugsordnung verboten und sollte auch gefährlich sein. Karl tat es auch niemals wenn er mit Passagieren fuhr, aber wenn er sie oben abgesetzt hatte und unten andere warteten, dann kannte er keine Rücksicht, und arbeitete an dem Seil mit starken taktmäßigen Griffen, wie ein Matrose. Er wußte übrigens, daß dies die andern Liftjungen auch taten und er wollte seine Passagiere nicht an andere Jungen verlieren. (188-189)

Utmost speed is of the essence in Karl's "hinunterrasen" between picking up guests. This emphasis on acceleration is reinforced by the mention of the express train, a faster, more modern version of an already fast and modern means of transportation. The rhythm that is imposed is irreconcilable with personal safety and physical bodily integrity. It is explicitly called dangerous, and there are rules that prohibit Karl's technique to speed up the process, acknowledging the danger of

the practice. However, the rules are mentioned only to specify how common it is to break them; it is considered a necessity among the employees, to keep up with the competition and not be the one who loses customers and potentially the job—which is exactly what will eventually happen to Karl when he has to abandon his post for a short time and is immediately fired. The workers have to take this risk and comply with the speed, and Karl is fully subjected to the “inhuman” element that he has observed in his uncle’s business. Here, too, a factory setting is created: The hand movements executed by Karl are referred to as “taktmäßige Griffe.” This evokes work-specific terminology relating to “Taktarbeit,” assembly-line work consisting in repetitive movements in strictly regulated fast pace, or maximum speed and efficiency. The “taktmäßige Griffe” are further specified, “wie ein Matrose.” “Matrose” refers back to the ships Karl observed in the harbor of New York that are rowed by “heiß arbeitenden Matrosen,” (27) thereby linking Karl to another heat-generating profession on a ship, the “Heizer”.

When Karl is fired, the head porter drags him to the porter’s lounge to watch a tumultuous scene, where the porters have to be attentive to unending requests, and the hands literally stand out: “Die meisten wollten etwas aus der Portiersloge holen oder etwas dort abgeben, so sah man immer auch ungeduldig fuchtelnde Hände aus dem Gedränge ragen” (256). Karl’s attention is especially caught by one of the two desk clerks who have to perform continuous “Handreichungen,” working nonstop until they are replaced when their shift and strength comes to an end: “Er sah weder auf die Tischplatte, wo er fortwährend Handreichungen auszuführen hatte, noch auf das Gesicht dieses oder jenes Fragers, sondern ausschließlich starr

vor sich, offenbar um seine Kräfte zu sparen und zu sammeln" (256). The head porter watches Karl observe the other workers and comments on the impression they make: "Offenbar hatte auch der Oberportier den großen Eindruck beobachtet, den diese Art der Auskunftserteilung auf Karl gemacht hatte, und er riß plötzlich an Karls Hand und sagte: 'Siehst Du, so wird hier gearbeitet'" (258-259).

The head porter's violent grip of Karl's hand is the continuation of a long passage where the head porter demonstrates his own hand efficiency by brutally manhandling Karl:

Er hielt Karl oben am Arm fest, aber nicht etwa mit ruhigem Griff, der schließlich auszuhalten gewesen wäre, sondern er lockerte hie und da den Griff und machte ihn dann mit Steigerung fester und fester, was bei seinen großen Körperkräften gar nicht aufzuhören schien und ein Dunkel vor Karls Augen verursachte. Aber er hielt Karl nicht nur, sondern als hätte er auch den Befehl bekommen ihn gleichzeitig zu strecken, zog er ihn auch hie und da in die Höhe und schüttelte ihn. (235-236)

Likewise, the interventions on his behalf, as the following one by Therese, are a contest of hand movements, as is Karl's continuous punishment:

"Lassen Sie ihn los, was kann es Ihnen denn für ein Vergnügen machen ihn zu quälen." Und sie griff sogar nach des Oberportiers Hand. "Befehl kleines Fräulein, Befehl", sagte der Oberportier und zog mit der freien Hand Therese freundlich an sich, während er mit der andern Karl nun sogar angestrengt drückte, als wolle er ihm nicht nur Schmerzen machen, sondern als habe er mit diesem in seinem Besitz befindlichen Arm ein besonderes Ziel, das noch lange nicht erreicht sei" (237).

Even Karl's own guilt is expressed in relation to the head porter's hands: "ja daß er nichts anderes verdiene, als unter die Hände des Oberportiers zu kommen"

(240). As a bad sign, Karl realizes the social and personal relationships are not in his favor: "Während er sich zum Abschied verbeugte, sah er flüchtig, wie der Oberkellner die Hand der Oberköchin wie im Geheimen umfaßte und mit ihr spielte" (253). This also shows that even the erotic sphere is subsumed under the omnipresent manual power struggles, something that Karl already has encountered when seduced by Johanna Brummer and will again encounter at his next employment, at Brunelda's.

Even Karl's fear to be led back to the head porter when he is almost picked up by a policeman is expressed in a fantasy of hands:

Es durfte nicht geschehn, daß er von einem Polizeimann escortiert wieder ins Hotel occidental zurückkäme, daß dort Verhöre stattfanden, . . . während der Oberkellner vielleicht nur voll Verständnis nicken, der Oberportier dagegen von der Hand Gottes sprechen würde, die den Lumpen endlich gefunden habe (278-279).

The head porter personifies the ruthless supervisor that fires Karl at the first infraction. His job designation, "Oberportier", also recalls the "Obermaschinist" Schubal, and is mirrored within the scene by the assistance of the "Oberkellner". After the head porter has brutally manhandled him, fired him, then dragged him to watch "how one is supposed to work", Karl is so scared of his powerful grip that it transcends the dimension of the workplace and evokes "God's hand", illustrating the fear of the omnipresent and omnipotent work supervisor.

Hand efficiency as omnipresent phenomenon

Throughout the text, the rushed pace of various hand movements is at odds with a natural pace of movement, such as the hands that clap “maschinenmäßig.” Especially in direct confrontation with machines, when comparing whether a machine dictates the hands’ movements or vice versa, the hand always comes out short. This domination of the machine transforms the human experience to a point that human movement is called “unmenschlich,” like the inhuman twitching of the telegraphist’s hand. It is also, as in Karl’s work as elevator boy, very dangerous.

It is not only the workspaces that evoke the extreme conditions of work at the assembly line; the necessity for the right “Handgriffe” extends beyond the direct work with machines, and “Amerika” is presented as an ubiquitous factory space. Hand movements inform the entirety of the economic sphere Karl finds himself in—only fastest reaction times guarantee financial well-being, as in the encounter with a waitress after having finished a meal with his two travel companions Robinson and Delamarche:

Ihr Haar gieng ihr von den Seiten ein wenig lose in Stirn und Wangen und sie strich es immer wieder zurück, indem sie mit den Händen darunter hinfuhr. Schließlich als man vielleicht das erste freundliche Wort von ihr erwartete, trat sie zum Tisch, legte beide Hände auf ihn und fragte: "Wer zahlt?" Nie waren Hände rascher aufgefliegen, als jetzt jene von Delamarche und Robinson, die auf Karl zeigten (148).

Karl getting lost in the observation of the waitress’ hands is a distraction that turns out to be a strategic mistake. He comes out last in the economic struggle

against two exploitative new acquaintances on the new continent, who seem, unlike Karl, to have mastered the art of speedy capitalism that dominates every aspect of life. Even the contexts that do not directly depict manual labor evoke conveyor belts and assembly lines.

Hand efficiency, with emphasis on maximum speed, is so pervasive that it is of equally great importance in social interactions—in fact, there seems to be no space that is safe from the requirement for maximum efficiency and speed. Even the personal confrontations (which are themselves always work related in the American factory-universe that Kafka portrays) are affected by efficiency and fast, coordinated movements. When Karl gets into a physical altercation with Klara, the daughter of his uncle's acquaintance Herr Pollunder, she explains the situation in terms of her better technical skills, specifically of fast hand movements: "hättest Du Jiu-Jitsu gelernt, hättest Du wahrscheinlich mich durchgeprügelt" (91-92). Since it is Klara who knows this martial art, the opposite is the case—Klara handles Karl "mit gut ausgenütztem Obergriff" (90). As she threatens to slap him, she does so systematically, with regularity and precision in her hand movements:

"Gib acht auf Deine Worte", sagte sie und ließ die eine Hand zu seinem Halse gleiten, den sie so stark zu würgen anfieng, daß Karl ganz unfähig war, etwas anderes zu tun, als Luft zu schnappen, während sie mit der andern Hand an seine Wange fuhr, wie probeweise sie berührte, sie wieder und zwar immer weiter in die Luft zurückzog und jeden Augenblick mit einer Ohrfeige niederfahren lassen konnte (91).

Personal relationships are subsumed under the economic sphere. This includes various sexual encounters, from Karl's original sin with Johanna Brummer,

to Klara Pollunder, to the time he spends at Brunelda's apartment, together with the unemployed mechanics ("Maschinenschlosser" [137]) Robinson and Delamarche. The stay with Brunelda makes explicit how much the employment situation (which Karl calls slave labor⁴⁸) is a threat to personal boundaries. The realms of employment, erotic relationships, and friendships, are all intermingled. They work, sleep, eat, grope, and violently beat each other in one small apartment consisting only of one room. There is no longer any private or personal space, and the body is under constant threat. Hands are used for various transgressions and fights, won by those with the fastest reaction times. Every action is presented as a contest of who is most efficient with their hands. In fact, Karl ends up at Brunelda's place after a struggle between whose hand he ends up in (after escaping the head porter's hand), Delamarche's or that of a policeman who has started interrogating him:

Und selbst wenn Karl an der Hand des Delamarche ins Hotel zurückkam, so war es viel weniger schlimm, als wenn es in Begleitung des Polizeimannes geschah. Vorläufig aber durfte natürlich Karl nicht zu erkennen geben, daß er tatsächlich zu Delamarche wollte, sonst war alles verdorben. Und unruhig sah er auf die Hand des Polizeimanns, die sich jeden Augenblick erheben konnte, um ihn zu fassen (282).

It is Delamarche's hand that wins out, as he grabs him after he tries to escape from both of them: "da griff aus einer kleinen Haustüre eine Hand nach Karl und zog ihn mit den Worten 'Still sein' in einen dunklen Flur" (285).

Brunelda's capricious tyranny is expressed in her slapstick-like gestures and movements. Robinson explains to Karl the treatment of a former servant at whom

she used to throw whatever she happened to hold in her hand:

aber der Diener wagte trotz der größten Bestechung nicht Brunelda zu fragen, ob sie ihn empfangen wollte, denn er hatte einigemal schon gefragt, und immer hatte ihm Brunelda das was sie gerade bei der Hand hatte ins Gesicht geworfen. Einmal sogar ihre große gefüllte Wärmeflasche und mit der hatte sie ihm einen Vorderzahn ausgeschlagen (306-307).

Hands are used to exert authority. Delamarche uses his fist to threaten (“drohte . . . mit der Faust” [287]), and Karl and especially Robinson are confronted with the “ärgerlichen Händefuchtelns des Delamarche” (295). But beyond gestures, hands are used to grope and beat almost as a normal form of communication among the “roommates.” Robinson tells Karl how upon meeting Brunelda he made a bad judgement regarding the placements of his own hands, and Delamarche’s immediate reaction:

kurz, ich habe sie ein bißchen hinten angerührt, aber ganz leicht weißt Du, nur so angerührt. Natürlich kann man das nicht dulden, daß ein Bettler eine reiche Dame anrührt. Es war ja fast keine Berührung, aber schließlich war es eben doch eine Berührung. Wer weiß, wie schlimm das ausgefallen wäre, wenn mir nicht Delamarche sofort eine Ohrfeige gegeben hätte und zwar eine solche Ohrfeige, daß ich sofort meine beiden Hände für die Wange brauchte” (304).

Karl, too, is constantly groped and molested by Brunelda, Robinson, and Delamarche, and sometimes by all three of them together in the most grotesque constellations.⁴⁹ Only in a moment of distraction can Karl defend himself from Brunelda’s “fat little hands”: “Und unter großen Seufzern, unruhig und zerstreut, nestelte sie an Karls Hemd, der möglichst unauffällig immer wieder diese kleinen

fetten Händchen wegzuschieben suchte, was ihm auch leicht gelang, denn Brunelda dachte nicht an ihn, sie war mit ganz anderen Gedanken beschäftigt" (325).

He also learns to fight back, for example when Robinson expresses himself too enthusiastically, talking about Brunelda: "“ich habe sie einmal nackt gesehen. Oh!’—und in der Erinnerung an diese Freude fieng er an, Karls Beine zu drücken und zu schlagen, bis Karl ausrief: ‘Robinson Du bist ja verrückt’, seine Hände packte und zurückstieß" (298). Later, he even tries to stand up to Delamarche: "“Aber laßt mich doch’, sagte Karl und machte sich bereit, wenn es nötig sein sollte, mit den Fäusten sich die Freiheit zu verschaffen, so wenig Aussicht auf Erfolg gegenüber einem Mann wie Delamarche auch war" (275).

Robinson has to provide many a "Handreichung" that seem as regimented as Karl's "Handgriffe," and that also mirror the "Handreichungen" in the Portiersloge:

Man hörte die kurzen Befehle des Delamarche die er dem Robinson erteilte, der nicht durch den jetzt verstellten eigentlichen Zugang des Raumes die Dinge reichte, sondern auf eine kleine Lücke zwischen einem Kasten und einer spanischen Wand angewiesen war, wobei er überdies bei jeder Handreichung den Arm weit ausstrecken und das Gesicht abgewendet halten mußte. (356)

Robinson seems to have perfected his own hand movements to survive among them, as Karl observes with great interest when he watches him prepare to eat without even having to get up: "Und Karl, der aufstand, sah nun zu, wie Robinson, ohne aufzustehn, sich auf den Bauch herüberwälzte und mit ausgestreckten Händen unter dem Sessel eine versilberte Schale hervorzog" (297).

He uses his hands quickly and efficiently as substitutes for all kinds of eating utensils: “während er mit einer Hand das vom Brot herabtropfende Öl auffieng, um von Zeit zu Zeit das noch übrige Brot in diese als Reservoir dienende hohle Hand zu tauchen” (301). Robinson quickly and efficiently uses his fingers to push back food that comes out of his mouth: “Robinson, der eine große Bonbonmasse auf der Zunge wälzte und hie und da ein Stück, das aus dem Mund gedrängt wurde mit den Fingern wieder zurückdrückte” (304).

Meals, now part of Karl’s job description, are exercises in hand efficiency and speed: “Hände eilten kreuz und quer über das Tischchen” (371). At other moments, Brunelda interferes with her hand, preventing Karl from preparing the table: “öfters hinderte sie ihn, indem sie vorzeitig mit ihrer weichen fetten womöglich gleich alles zerdrückenden Hand irgendeinen Bissen für sich hervorholte” (370). Brunelda’s quick and efficient use of hands extends to Karl’s compensation for a job well done: Brunelda “nickte Delamarche befriedigt zu und reichte Karl zum Lohn eine Handvoll Keks” (371).⁵⁰

The stay with Brunelda is a lowpoint for Karl, and he finally liberates himself when he decides to join the theater of Oklahoma, an institution that claims to welcome everybody and which seems to be a promisingly different place. An administrator decides that Karl’s job will be that of technical worker:

“Und er winkte einem der Diener, die beschäftigungslos zwischen den Barrieren herumgiengen: ‘Führen Sie diesen Herrn zu der Kanzlei für Leute mit technischen Kenntnissen.’ Der Diener faßte den Befehl wörtlich auf und faßte Karl bei der Hand” (400).

But rather than salvation, this is a continuation of Karl's situation of being literally and figuratively manipulated by hands faster than his own, dangerously similar in phrasing those of the Oberportier: "Ich bin doch schon entlassen", sagte Karl und meinte damit, daß ihm im Hotel niemand mehr etwas zu befehlen habe. 'Solange ich Dich halte bist Du nicht entlassen', sagte der Portier, was allerdings auch richtig war" (255).⁵¹ Karl's final fate is linked to this literal manipulation. After being dragged away, he is being literally, with a nametag, labeled, as technischer Arbeiter," (409) and also assigned a new name, Negro, very likely a statement connected to his earlier assessment of his employment with Brunelda as slave labor.⁵² This treatment shows that the theater offers Karl just another variation of his earlier predicaments of being handled and manipulated, and this includes Kafka's own manipulation of the protagonist's fate, who notes in 1915 about the final outcome: "Roßmann und K., der Schuldlose und der Schuldige, schließlich beide unterschiedslos strafweise umgebracht, der Schuldlose mit leichter Hand, mehr zur Seite geschoben als niedergeschlagen".⁵³ This phrasing echoes Robinson's initial explanation of his position at Brunelda's that had led Karl to the assessment of slave labor: "Du, ich bin ganz bei Seite geschoben. Und wenn man immerfort als Hund behandelt wird denkt man schließlich man ist wirklich" (298). This idea now extends to Karl, who, instead of monetary compensation is being fed "eine Handvoll Keks" in a universe where fast and efficient hand movements control every aspect of life but are a language that Karl does not fully master.

The hand as commentary on contemporaneous work practices

With the continuous focus on the restless, omnipresent hand, Kafka incorporates a trope that can be interpreted as a criticism of industrialization and the accompanying social consequences. Just as the clenched fist and the hand ostentatiously holding objects of power can be seen as an allusion to work imagery, Kafka's emphasis on the hand as subjected to fast-paced rhythm can be read as a conscious commentary on contemporary work practices, especially those that have become the norm within fully mechanized and automated factory work. Hartmut Rosa sees the origins of a modern acceleration of work and an accompanying social acceleration in the period around 1900 and points out

dass die Jahrzehnte vor und nach 1900 infolge der industriellen Revolution und ihrer breitenwirksamen technischen Neuerungen auch eine Geschwindigkeitsrevolution in nahezu allen Lebenssphären mit sich brachten. Gewiss ist es kein Zufall, dass Werner Siemens und Henry Adams just in diesem Zeitraum (1886 und 1904) unabhängig voneinander ein "Gesetz der Beschleunigung" der Kulturentwicklung postulierten.⁵⁴

The hands in *Der Verschollene* illustrate both the industrial as well as the social acceleration.

The focus on the working hand's generic nature —and the repetition of simple movements that make the worker and his reduction to hand movements the accessory that has to adapt to the machine—was famously described by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*: the worker has become "ein bloßes Zubehör

der Maschine, von dem nur der einfachste, eintönigste, am leichtesten erlernbare Handgriff verlangt wird".⁵⁵ The passages in *Der Verschollene* that feature hands at work show such a reduction to the "Handgriff" of the individual and the social and psychological consequences that come with such work.⁵⁶

In the early decades of the twentieth century, this problem had become worse with increasingly complex mechanized work, and it affected the worker physically. In *Mechanization Takes Command*, Sigfried Giedion looks at the human hand in specifically this context of further developed mechanization, and he breaks down the incompatibility between the worker and the machine to the nature of the human hand. The hand's articulation and flexibility extends to the entire body and mind; it is the essential organ for the human ability to work, and in a way, incorporates and represents the entire body metonymically:

The triple-articulated fingers, the wrist, the elbow, the shoulders, and, on occasion, the trunk and legs heighten the flexibility and adaptability of the hand. Muscles and tendons determine how it will seize and hold the object. Its sensitive skin feels and recognizes materials. The eye steers its movement. But vital to all this integrated work is the mind that governs and the feelings that lend it life. The kneading of bread; the folding of a cloth; the moving of brush over canvas: each movement has its root in the mind.⁵⁷

Giedion comes to the verdict that it is exactly this potential of the hand—its complex, multiple and wide-reaching functions—that is at odds with the basics of mechanized work, automatization and repetition; the hand's multi-functionality here is described as causing its inherent lack of compatibility with machines:

For all the complicated tasks to which this organic tool may rise, to one thing

it is poorly suited: automatization. In its very way of performing movement, the hand is ill fitted to work with mathematical precision and without pause. Each movement depends on an order that the brain must constantly repeat. It wholly contradicts the organic, based on growth and change, to suffer automatization. . . . The hand can be trained to a degree of automatic facility. But one power is denied to it: to remain unvaryingly active. It must always be grasping, holding, manipulating. It cannot continue a movement in endless rotation. That is precisely what mechanization entails: endless rotation.⁵⁸

It is the specific movements and tempos of mechanical work—the endless rotation, similar to the endless telecommunications in the uncle’s company and the Portiersloge, and Karl’s elevator work—that is against the nature of the hand. At the same time, it is exactly because of the hand’s potential ability that industrial work can be perceived as such a fall from grace, a demotion and disenfranchisement of the hand as a dignified, human instrument of work.⁵⁹

“Amerika” as epitome of modern production techniques

Giedion’s description of the highly mechanized workplace is not only written almost a century later than Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, but it also provides a geographical shift by specifically focusing on American production methods. And it is significant that Kafka’s “Dickensroman” is set in “Amerika” rather than London or Prague. The setting of the novel in America is a way to intensify the contemporary element, because the United States emphasizes the modern element: In a letter to his publisher Kurt Wolff, Kafka refers to his own aspiration to depict “das allmodernste New York.”⁶⁰ Perhaps the most important

function for sending his protagonist to Amerika is the fact that it is quintessentially modern. Back in Kafka's (and Karl Roßmann's) Prague, America functions as code for the modern, new world.⁶¹

In the European industrial nations of the prewar years, America was especially associated with technological innovations and new production methods. The United States was at the forefront of a second phase of the Industrial Revolution, an "Electrical Revolution" (also known as the "Technological" or "Second Industrial Revolution") where electrification was the basis for developments that took manufacturing methods to a further stage, especially through the assembly line, the prominence of which Giedion describes: "The symptom of full mechanization is the assembly line, wherein the entire factory is consolidated into a synchronous organism. From its first appearance . . . the assembly line is an American institution."⁶² As Kafka knew from direct experience with assessing factories, electricity (including artificial light) is a prerequisite for extended, and virtually indefinite work hours and exponentially increased production, along with a set of new problems that come with it.⁶³ Christoph Asendorf describes the overwhelming influence of the electrification in Europe around 1900:

Die gesellschaftlich am stärksten umwälzend wirkende Form der Durchaderung ist gegen Ende des Jahrhunderts die mit elektrischen Leitungen. . . Elektrizität ist die universell verwendbare Energie schlechthin, mit ihr werden Informationen übertragen, Lampen gespeist, Maschinen angetrieben, sie wird als Düngemittel, zur Elektrotherapie und zu Hinrichtungen verwendet—die Adern durchziehen den Gesellschaftskörper und werden von allen Seiten an Dinge und Menschen angeschlossen.⁶⁴

“Amerika” is also the origin of an extreme rationalization of work: Frederick Taylor’s system of “scientific management” or Taylorism, a system of analysis of work processes aimed at optimizing them in order to increase efficiency and productivity.⁶⁵ Among other things, this included the very detailed study of the smallest hand movements that were analyzed, improved for efficiency, and standardized. Important for Taylor were also Frank and Lilian Gilbreth’s motion studies of the human body; Giedion calls Frank Gilbreth “the master of motion studies, who probed so deeply the nature of manual activity.”⁶⁶

Amerika as setting for the novel allows for a more extreme depiction of work methods that can almost be understood as a parody of Taylorism. American production techniques were becoming more and more influential in Europe at the time of Kafka’s writing. Kafka, through his insurance work, which required a detailed knowledge of technological work processes for his fields of specialization, risk assessment and accident prevention, knew of the controversies surrounding the gradual adoption of such fast-paced hyperefficiency of American production methods in Europe. The debates on this issue were particularly prevalent in 1912 and the following years (as I will show below), which coincides with his work on *Der Verschollene*. A particularly important source for *Der Verschollene* on American work practices was also Arthur Holitscher’s travel report *Amerika: heute und morgen*, as I will show after that. In his insurance work, Kafka continued to encounter Taylorism; in a letter to Grete Bloch from 1914, Kafka writes about the commercial and technical reorganization of a domestic company “durch einen

Amerikaner”:

Ich habe vor ein paar Tagen mit dem einen Chef einer großen Wäschefabrik, Joss und Löwenstein, gesprochen, Eugen Löwenstein heißt er. Das Gespräch kam auf Organisationsfragen, er läßt gerade durch einen Amerikaner seinen ganzen kommerziellen und technischen Betrieb neu organisieren. Das erste, woran ich natürlich dachte, waren Ihre Maschinen. Sie haben sie auch in der Fabrik, aber die wollen sie abschaffen . . ., es bewährt sich nicht.⁶⁷

Kafka's colleague, the Workmen's Accident Insurance's statistician Alois Gütling, with whom he worked closely, included direct references to Taylorism in his 1916 article, "Beiträge zur Unfallversicherung und Unfallstatistik", where he argues for the appropriation of Taylor's methods for the purposes of accident statistics:

Bei jedem Betriebe gliedert sich der gesamte Arbeitsprozeß in Arbeitsphasen, Phasenteile, Arbeitstätigkeiten, schließliche in Handgriffe, bzw. Bewegungen. Und da es theoretisch möglich ist, diese Teilung in Phasen, Arbeitsvorgänge und Handgriffe durchzuführen, ist es auch möglich, die Unfallgefahr jeder Bewegung festzustellen. Daß dies aber auch praktisch durchführbar ist, den Beweis erbrachte, wenn auch für andere Zwecke, der große amerikanische Statistiker, Frederick Winslow Taylor, Dr. phil honoris causa, Ehrenpräsident der American Society of Mechanical Engineers.⁶⁸

In the article, Gütling also concedes that a potentially positive view of

Taylorist methods is still highly uncharacteristic at the time of his writing.⁶⁹

In Europe, the challenges that the human body, and especially the human hand, encounter in mechanical work contexts were likewise being studied in the first decades of the twentieth century. Both American and European work science were preoccupied with studying the compatibilities and incompatibilities between

the human body and the technological apparatus and how to adapt human work to industrial production; the hand, at the direct intersection of body and machine, is at the center of such studies. In *The Human Motor*, Anson Rabinbach explains that both movements' self-declared goals were "to analyze the worker's task and movements in minute detail"; herein, "each claimed to improve productivity and efficiency, and each claimed to be able to transcend the constraints of class interest and ideology in the interest of a rational and scientific economic organization."⁷⁰

But the American and European approaches also had significant differences, as Rabinbach shows. Whereas for both European work science and Taylorism, the "rationalization of production was predicated on rationalization of the body,"⁷¹ the differences were found in *how* the human body was to be rationalized. In European work science, the idea was to find the optimal movement best suited to preserve the energy reserves of human work power, and the mental and physical experience of the worker was taken into account. Even though the primary purpose was to preserve human energy to the best possible level for the economic well being of the state, worker satisfaction counted as an important component. The Taylor system held that component of worker satisfaction could be neglected, and that material compensation of the worker could replace it entirely. According to Rabinbach, the Taylor system aimed to "raise the level of productivity of the individual worker and enterprise, whereas the science of labor endeavored to preserve and maintain the worker's energy in the interest of society."⁷²

It was especially the confrontation between European work science and

Taylorism that was part of the public discussion on work-related issues in the years of Kafka's work on *Der Verschollene*. For this reading of *Der Verschollene*, it is not so much specific qualities and differences between the two models that are relevant, but rather the contemporary presence of a European discussion of the American influence with the strong emphasis on work pace and work rhythm. Thus, the following summary of some of the main arguments for and against Taylorism, based on Rabinbach's analysis, will focus on the issue that is so important within the novel: the control over the worker's body, including the hand's unnatural pace and rhythm. Hugo Münsterberg,⁷³ who was among the earliest recipients of Taylorism in Germany, criticized, in 1910, Taylor's system for "its disinterest in the subjective experience of the worker."⁷⁴ He did, however, point to "its superiority in organizing industrial work based on the tempos and rhythms of the modern factory."⁷⁵ This issue of these "rhythms and tempos" of the modern factory is a main point of contention that is present in the European debates of Taylorism. A critical position on the question of maximum speed where wages were linked to productivity through "time and motion" studies was, for instance, to claim that the "essence of the Taylor system was simply the speed, or tempo, of production, which widened the distance between worker and management, created meaningless work, and relied on compulsion."⁷⁶ Most European critics contested the scientific neutrality of the Taylor system and saw a clear bias towards businesses and employers. An example of a favorable view, in line with Münsterberg's affirmation of the system's efficiency, describes Taylorism as "a means of reducing the worker's gestures to the strictly necessary and without surplus fatigue, the application of the method of 'jiu-

jiitsu' to industry."⁷⁷ Kafka has the character of Klara spell out this type of reasoning for efficient, fast-paced application of movement and speed when she refers to her own jiu-jitsu practice (91). Rabinbach summarizes the European reception of Taylorism: "If the Taylor system seemed to confirm the indispensability of research in fatigue and psychological expertise, in industry, for others it epitomized the crucial distinction between maximal and optimal productivity."⁷⁸ (For Kafka, the distinction between optimal and maximal efficiency is also at the center of his professional activities in risk assessment and accident prevention, as I will show in my next chapter.)

The "inhumanely" twitching fingers of the telecommunicator and Karl's "takmäßig[e] Handgriffe" are expressions of such total control over the human body and the human hand. Pointing to work scenes in *Der Verschollene*, Reiner Stach attributes Kafka to be "[d]er Erste, der den Wahnsinn der Taylorisierung und die völlige Entwertung der individuellen Leistung als literarisches Thema begreift und bewältigt."⁷⁹ And more than a general theme, the hands show that it is a direct application of the physical and psychological effects, a treatment of the theme that mimics the Taylorist analysis of breaking down movement to the smallest unit by presenting hands broken down to the smallest units far beyond the realm of the factory.

If we are to believe Gustav Janouch's account, in later years Kafka remained extremely critical of Taylorism, especially of the administration of time that it entails. Janouch quotes Kafka:

“Time, the noblest and most essential element in all creative work, is conscripted into the net of corrupt business interests. Thereby, not only creative work, but man himself, who is its essential part, is polluted and humiliated. A Taylorized life is a terrible curse which will give rise only to hunger and misery instead of the intended wealth and profit . . . The conveyor belt of life carries one somewhere—but one doesn’t know where. One is a thing, an object—rather than a living organism.”⁸⁰

Even if one disputes the authenticity of Janouch’s rendering, *Der Verschollene* shows exactly this kind of objectification of the worker and his body. “A Taylorized life,” a “conveyor belt of life” is what Kafka describes. Kafka’s—and Karl’s—Amerika is the amplification and exaggeration of American work methods that extend beyond single factories. America is portrayed as a ubiquitous factory space where Taylorist methods control not only factories, but every aspect of life, including social interactions that are depicted as a parody of humans being reduced to almost automated hand movements. The American setting will intensify the speed and regimentation of work, and fast movements show the tension between the worker as individual and as part of a larger collective in a more radical fashion.

A particularly important source for illustrating Amerika as a ubiquitous Taylorist factory space was Arthur Holitscher’s *Amerika: heute und morgen*, which Kafka read and which is widely acknowledged as an influential source for *Der Verschollene*.⁸¹ Holitscher, who was politically engaged as a socialist presents a critical view of American conditions.⁸² In his chapter about American factories, Taylorism is described with concrete examples, with the hand featured prominently.⁸³ Holitscher describes the unnatural speed and rhythm, broken down into precise hand movements, carefully calculated for maximum efficiency. Echoing

Marx and Engels' reduction to the repetitive "Handgriffe," and anticipating Gideon, Holitscher characterizes work at the assembly line as being an affront to the human body, especially the human hand:

Jeder dieser Menschen hat, von 7 Uhr früh bis 7 Uhr abends, denselben kleinen, aber wichtigen Handgriff zu vollführen; er muß aufpassen, daß er ihm gelinge, denn die Kette kennt keinen Aufenthalt. . . . Rechne es dir aus, wie oft ein Mensch, eine Kreatur mit diesem wundervollen Mechanismus des Herzens, des Nerven- und Gangliensystems, mit der staunenswerten Muskulatur des Armes, der Gelenke, der Hände und Finger in 10mal 60mal 60 Sekunden, die gleiche, immer gleiche Bewegung ausführen muß, damit jener Mechanismus, jenes Mysterium nicht stocke, erlösche, damit es notdürftig fort sich friste durch eine dunkle Nacht hinüber zu einem trostlosen Morgen.⁸⁴

He emphasizes the psychological and social effects of employees that can be fired at any moment, which creates an atmosphere of fear and agitation where no hand movement is fast enough: "Wenn das armselige Wesen oben im Packsaal täglich 15 000 Blechdosen in Papier einwickelt – ihre Hände bewegen sich rasend rasch, so daß man die Finger kaum sieht – so genügt ein mißgelaunter Blick der Aufseherin, und sie wird morgen, bei Entlassungsstrafe, 16 000 und 17 000 Dosen einwickeln usw."⁸⁵

The hand is not just a sign of subjection to the machine, but is also physically threatened:

Vor den meisten zischt und wettert und schlägt eine Maschine, die sie zu bedienen haben. Haarscharfe Nadeln bohren haardünne Löcher in kleine Kupferplättchen, ein Augenblick, ein um einen Millimeter zu weites Vorwärtsschieben des Fingers, und die Nadel fährt ins Fleisch, in den Fingernagel, das Brot verschwindet mit dem Bewußtsein, das den Körper mildtätig ein paar Augenblicke lang von seinen Schmerzen erlöst.⁸⁶

Holitscher explains these descriptions by referring directly to Taylorism, “das System der ‘wissenschaftlichen Ausnutzung der menschlichen Kraft im Dienste der Fabrikarbeit’, das System des ‘Speedingup’, der Aufpulverung, wie ich es nennen möchte, das System der Anspannung und des Verbrauches der menschlichen Energie bis an die äußerste Grenze der natürlichen Bedingungen.”⁸⁷ Here, speed is emphasized as inhuman by describing Taylorism as System des “Speedingup” and Holitscher describes how “der speedboss, ‘Hetz-Vogt’, bestimmt das Tempo, die Stückzahl, die geliefert werden muß; er ist der Mann, einen Rekord von seinen Leuten zu verlangen; wer den Rekord nicht einhält, fliegt aus seinem Job und kann zusehn, wie er weiterkommt in diesem Leben.”⁸⁸

The “speedboss” determines the speed and personifies the constant threat of being fired. In *Der Verschollene*, such a “speedboss” appears, for instance, in the figure of the head porter, and the harrowing work rhythm pervades every aspect of work, especially at the Hotel Occidental where the manhandling and abuse of Karl’s body at the hand’s of the head porter doesn’t even end after being fired. In Holitscher’s text, Taylorism is described as all-encompassing and pervasive. He too describes an Amerika where the status of the worker is visible far beyond the factories: “Neben den Bettlern mit heiler Haut fallen einem die Verstümmelten aller Kategorien peinlich auf. Rabelais könnte sich keine groteskeren Gesellen wünschen als diese im Getriebe des amerikanischen Fabrikwesens zu Schaden gekommenen Gestalten, die einem in den Straßen, in den Kneipen, an den Drehkurbeln der Lifte begegnen.”⁸⁹ The grim picture even mentions Karl’s temporary job, that of an

elevator boy, as a site that shows the pervasive influence of American factories on everyday impressions.

Holitscher also explains how Taylorist methods are applied to fields outside actual factories. As an example, he describes how in the construction business movements are broken down to various “Handgriffe” in the interest of maximum speed:

Andre haben dieses System auf andre Gewerbe angewandt, Gilbreth z. B. auf das Maurergewerbe. Der amerikanische Maurer hebt den Ziegelstein nicht mehr mit beiden Händen, sondern mit der rechten Hand, derweil führt die linke den Spachtel in die Kalklösung. Auf diese Weise wird ein Ziegelhaus im Tempo von 350 Ziegeln die Stunde erbaut, statt wie bisher im Tempo von 120 Ziegeln die Stunde.⁹⁰

The general verdict in Holitscher’s chapter on factories is one of shock, even horror:

Ohne einzelne Fabriken, die ich gesehen habe, zu denunzieren, muß ich sagen, daß ich auf dermaßen unhygienische, mörderische und verbrecherisch vernachlässigte »Shops« doch nicht vorbereitet war. . . Unfallsversicherungen, Altersversorgung, Invaliditätspension und ähnliche zivilisierte Dinge kennt das demokratische Land des freien Wettbewerbes nicht.⁹¹

Holitscher describes unregulated speed and an unregulated society and transfers the individual significance to the social one by including social insurance, specifically accident insurance. This reference to the lack of accident insurance certainly must have resonated with Kafka.

Holitscher’s account strongly influenced Kafka’s imagination of “Amerika” as

ubiquitous Taylorist space and depiction of a rampant capitalism that leaves no room for individual safety. For Kafka, setting the novel in Amerika allows for the biggest tension between the views of the worker and the human subject as individual and as instrumentalized or objectified. It may also have allowed Kafka to be more critical of the social implications of work without making the connection to his work at the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute too obvious, as a similar novel set in Bohemia probably would have done.⁹² Amerika is thus both a way to present the subject matter in its extreme, and at the same time, by "outsourcing" it, soften the social implications. Amerika can therefore be seen as a somewhat undefined, hyperbolic space that allows for a parody and perversion of the extreme rationalization of work methods that is as relevant within the European context.⁹³ Kafka has his protagonist spell out the similarities in workplace rules (or absence of rules) at the crucial point when he loses his job as an elevator boy:

Karl sah ein, daß er eigentlich seinen Posten schon verloren hatte. . . Es war allerdings schneller gegangen, als er gedacht hatte, denn schließlich hatte er doch zwei Monate gedient so gut er konnte und gewiß besser als mancher andere Junge. Aber auf solche Dinge wird eben im entscheidenden Augenblick offenbar in keinem Weltteil, weder in Europa noch in Amerika Rücksicht genommen, sondern es wird so entschieden, wie einem in der ersten Wut das Urteil aus dem Munde fährt. (228)

In the passage of Karl getting fired, this reflection on the unjust practice is a rare glimpse of rather direct social critique within a slapstick-like scene of the abuse by the Oberportier, just as Karl's comment about the work at Brunelda's being slave labor is a serious observation in a predominantly grotesque, comedic rendering of the work struggle. The story of Therese about her mother's death as a

whole can be understood as such a “serious” comment within the grotesque universe of *Der Verschollene*, as I will show in the following.

3. “Handlangerinnen”: personal and anonymous hands as clashing perspectives of the subject

The story of Therese features the novel’s most ostentatious critique of social circumstances and the depiction of a merciless Taylorism that affects every aspect of life. In it, Kafka combines the elements of the fate of the replaceable worker, similar to the stoker, the overdetermined figurative value of the hand, its machine-like pace, and the depiction of the anonymous worker as part of a machine. Therese’s story intensifies the tension between the individual and the impersonal view of the worker, and focuses on the figure of the reaching, stretched out hand which appears prominently in its double function: It stands for the only remaining bond between mother and child and its failure under extremely adverse economic circumstances, as well as the reduction of the individual to the rushed and harrowed “Handgriff,” both captured in the term “Handlangerinnen”⁹⁴ (201). The story is set on a construction site, and illustrates Holitscher’s example of the frantically moving hands of the “Maurergewerbe.” At the same time, the story is a condensation of Karl’s story and the novel as a whole, as I will demonstrate. Finally, in its description of a work accident, it seems to be taken directly from Kafka’s

professional experience from his insurance work, as I will show in conclusion of this chapter.

While the hand-struggles between Karl and Klara, Karl and Robinson/Delamarche/Brunelda, and Karl and the Oberportier can be seen as a grotesque rendition and parody of a jiu-jitsu-Taylorist universe, the following story is narrated in a completely different tone. It is a story about a work accident, told by Therese, Karl's fellow Hotel Occidental employee. The story is very isolated and clearly marked as a separate narrative, a story within the story, solemnly introduced and summarized as such by the narrator: "Einmal erzählte Therese . . . vom Tode ihrer Mutter" (196). The tone, unlike the general tone of the novel, depicts much more directly the most dire work conditions for an unqualified worker in economic, and, as a result, increasingly physical and mental distress. This is done with a change of perspective—not only by assuming the perspective of a different character, but by that character as a child, who becomes an orphan in the process. As a story within the story, it showcases the hand as a main trope for conveying the mother's and the child's desperation, and to visualize the physical perspective of a small, frightened and helpless child.

The character of Therese herself, who will provide this story within the story, is appropriately introduced with the focus on her writing, typing hands. This image takes up the motif of the rhythmically moving hands, and combines it with the act of writing.

Im Hotel wurde Karl gleich in eine Art Bureau geführt, in welchem die

Oberköchin ein Vormerkbuch in der Hand einer jungen Schreibmaschinistin einen Brief in die Schreibmaschine diktierter. Das äußerst präzise Diktieren, der beherrschte und elastische Tastenschlag jagten an dem nur hie und da merklichen Ticken der Wanduhr vorüber, die schon fast halb zwölf Uhr zeigte. "So!" sagte die Oberköchin, klappte das Vormerkbuch zu, die Schreibmaschinistin sprang auf und stülpte den Holzdeckel über die Maschine, ohne bei dieser mechanischen Arbeit die Augen von Karl zu lassen. (171)

Karl's first impression, as often, consists in the focus on the hands, which takes up the motif of the inhuman twitching of the fingers of the telegraphist or the motorboat captain. Here, it also anticipates the story and links Therese with the context of manual labor by describing it in the same terms of the fast moving hands of various other workers and members of the Taylorist universe that commands maximum speed and efficiency.⁹⁵ The act of dictating indicates that the movement of her hands is controlled by the pace of the work, rather than the other way around. The ticking of the clock functions as counterpoint to the rhythm of the typing and as an additional element of the importance of time and pace, which is also emphasized by the fact that the time which the clock displays is "already" what it is, adding a sense a urgency and pressure to rush. Therese's reaction of jumping up reinforces the importance of the fast pace and speedy reaction time, as well as the link between high speed performance and employment. A perceived threat which she later reveals, her fear that Karl has come to replace her by taking over her position, is already hinted at here, and shown to be an existential threat, especially in combination with her every movement intended to keep up the pace of her work. The automatic movement of covering the "Maschine" is explicitly designated as "mechanische Arbeit," evoking an industrial atmosphere rather than

an office (or rather, “eine Art Bureau”). While the “Oberköchin” is described in other passages as mostly empathetic, motherly superior, here she is the one who dictates the work rhythm, which links her to the other “Ober”-cast of superiors and supervisors.

The fact that the speed of the typing is not self-determined should also be understood as an anticipation of Therese’s lack of agency in her own story and over that story. The story is the exploration of an inhuman, helpless position; here, the hand will be a trope of disorientation, loss of stability, and of circumstances that destroy the bond between a mother and her child.

Einmal erzählte Therese -- Karl stand neben ihr beim Fenster und sah auf die Straße—vom Tode ihrer Mutter. Wie die Mutter und sie an einem Winterabend—sie konnte damals etwa fünf Jahre alt gewesen sein—jede mit ihrem Bündel durch die Straßen eilten, um Schlafstellen zu suchen. Wie die Mutter sie zuerst *bei der Hand führte*, es war ein Schneesturm und nicht leicht vorwärtszukommen, *bis die Hand erlahmte* und sie Therese ohne sich nach ihr umzusehn losließ, die sich nun Mühe geben mußte, sich selbst an den Rücken der Mutter *festzuhalten*. Oft stolperte Therese und fiel sogar, aber die Mutter war wie in einem Wahn und hielt nicht an.⁹⁶ (196)

The combination of cold weather, no place to sleep, and no employment points to the dire circumstances. Amidst these conditions, they “rush” and try to “get ahead” as fast as possible despite the snowstorm. The mother’s pace is manic (“wie in einem Wahn”), even though this makes her daughter stumble repeatedly. Her mother’s back is turned to her, and there is no physical description of the mother other than the hand that holds her own hand, indicating the child’s visual perspective. Therese holds on to this hand, until the mother’s hand becomes too

exhausted and Therese has to hold on to the mother's skirt. The mother's exhaustion and fatigue, a common and serious problem for workers at the time, manifests itself in the hand which, as a result of the rushed pace, becomes "lame" ("erlahmte")—the hand that provides the manual labor, and that also is here the connection between mother and daughter. The abandonment created through the withdrawal of the hand is exacerbated by the mother's pace. It is also the first sentence that does not start as "wie die Mutter," letting go of this personal element and switching to direct discourse. The explanation for this haste is directly linked to her work condition—the mother had already been without work the last two days and fears missing out on her next chance, ironically called "günstige Gelegenheit":

Nun war der Mutter für den nächsten Morgen Arbeit bei einem Bau in Aussicht gestellt worden, aber sie fürchtete wie sie Therese den ganzen Tag über zu erklären suchte, die günstige Gelegenheit nicht ausnützen zu können, denn sie fühlte sich totmüde, hatte schon am Morgen zum Schrecken der Passanten auf der Gasse viel Blut gehustet, und ihre einzige Sehnsucht war, irgendwo in die Wärme zu kommen und sich auszuruhen. (197)

Therese's perspective remains mostly that of the child, with exceptions spelled out explicitly as such. For example, as a five year old, Therese is led to believe that the mother is actually trying to run away from her, and the abandonment is expressed again through the grasping hands:

Für das Kind war es natürlich ein unbegreifliches Leid, einmal von der Mutter gehalten, einmal sich an ihr festhaltend, ohne ein kleines Wort des Trostes mitgeschleift zu werden, und das Ganze schien damals für seinen Unverstand nur die Erklärung zu haben, daß die Mutter von ihm weglaufen wolle. Darum *hielt sich Therese desto fester*, selbst wenn die Mutter sie *an einer Hand hielt*, der Sicherheit halber *auch noch mit der andern Hand an den Rücken der Mutter*.⁹⁷ (199)

The hand indicates the child's view, her only, or even last, bond to her mother in the hopeless situation. The confusing dynamic of trying to hold on to her mother is also called "unbegreifliches Leid," semantically reinforcing the experience as one specifically experienced by the hands. That bond, and the attempt to gain hold and stability (and quite literally, not to fall over) in retrospect, is linked with the impossibility of achieving it. Therefore, when Therese describes the subsequent actions of her mother, the reader already knows that the holding, grasping hand has a threatening quality to it. The lack of being able to hold on to the mother's hand shifts to a fixation on the mother's hands, which are themselves unable to hold on to things for stability. When they cross a bridge, it is specified that it is "eine Brücke, wo die Mutter mit der Hand den Reif vom Geländer streifte" (200). Rather than conveying stability, this emphasizes the exposed, naked, unprotected hand in the adverse weather conditions, and the lack of stability through the "Reif" on the railing.

Immediately preceding the fall, at the construction site itself, the mother's hands and opportunities (and lack thereof) to hold on to various items for balance are enumerated, mixed with the outrage about her mother not having been stopped by anyone:

Oben umgieng die Mutter geschickt die Maurer die Ziegel auf Ziegel legten und sie *unbegreiflicher* Weise nicht zur Rede stellten, sie *hielt sich vorsichtig mit zarter Hand* an einem Holzverschlag der als Geländer diente . . . Nun kam aber die Mutter auf ihrem Gang zu einem kleinen Ziegelhaufen, vor dem das Geländer und wahrscheinlich auch der Weg aufhörte, aber sie *hielt sich nicht daran*, gieng auf den Ziegelhaufen los, ihre Geschicklichkeit schien sie

verlassen zu haben, sie stieß den Ziegelhaufen um und fiel über ihn hinweg in die Tiefe.⁹⁸ (201-202)

The fact that the mother is not stopped, “unbegreiflicherweise,” equally semantically connects to the mother’s loss of stability and Therese’s observations, rendering the mother’s “careful” attempts to hold on to the makeshift railing, and the fact that it happens “mit zarter Hand” emphasizes the fragility. The mother’s decision to continue past the railing, to keep walking against better judgement is elliptically described as “sie hielt sich nicht daran,” continuing the image of the hand on the provisory “Geländer” by using the same phrase first in a literal and then a figurative sense.

After the repeated description of the mother’s reaching hands, Therese refers to her mother as “Handlangerin,” and this definition of her work status links the hands in the work context with the hand as the main trope of abandonment and loss of balance. Therese is surprised to see the mother climb the ladder at the construction site, specifically because of her low status as “Handlangerin”:

Ohne sich in der Bauhütte zu melden, wie dies üblich war, und ohne jemanden zu fragen, stieg die Mutter eine Leiter hinauf, als wisse sie schon selbst welche Arbeit ihr zugeteilt war. Therese wunderte sich darüber, da die *Handlangerinnen* gewöhnlich nur unten mit Kalklöschchen, mit dem *Hinreichen* der Ziegel und mit sonstigen einfachen Arbeiten beschäftigt werden. Sie dachte daher, die Mutter wolle heute eine besser bezahlte Arbeit ausführen und lächelte verschlafen zu ihr hinauf.⁹⁹ (201)

The mother is reduced to the stretched-out hand that serves the “Hinreichen der Ziegel,” “Handlangerinnen” being a generic term for low-skill work. At the same

time the term directly connects this job to the impressions of the night before, when Therese is trying to grasp her mother's extended hand while reaching for the mother with her own hands, as well as her impressions from the morning when the mother is repeatedly trying to balance herself with her hand. "Handlangerinnen" thus directly links the adverse conditions of the mother and Therese to the specific work of the mother that consists of repetitive hand functions that also make her so easily replaceable and her job so insecure, which leads to her desperate state. At the same time, it is her failure to stick to her definition as "Handlangerin" that ultimately kills her, because she climbs the ladder without asking what work she has been assigned, "als wisse sie schon selbst welche Arbeit ihr zugeteilt war" (201). Whether it is the result of the mother being conditioned to perform at high efficiency and risk, or whether this attempt at autonomy is a form of hubris that the mother will be punished for, her death is directly linked to the larger economic imperative of maximum speed and efficiency.

The death is particularly brutal because the accident does not end with her own fall, but with various objects, including the same Ziegel that define the Handlangerinnen status, piling up over her body:¹⁰⁰

Viele Ziegel rollten ihr nach und schließlich eine ganze Weile später löste sich irgendwo ein schweres Brett los und krachte auf sie nieder. Die letzte Erinnerung Thereses an ihre Mutter war, wie sie mit auseinandergestreckten Beinen dalag in dem karierten Rock, der noch aus Pommern stammte, wie jenes auf ihr liegende rohe Brett sie fast bedeckte, wie nun die Leute von allen Seiten zusammenliefen und wie oben vom Bau irgendein Mann zornig etwas hinunterrief. (202)

The mother's skirt is the last Therese sees of her, an inanimate object that has been mentioned twice before as a substitute for the mother's hand. The fact that the only physical attributes that are described of the living mother are her hands ("vorsichtig" "mit zarter Hand" "bis die Hand erlahmte") while there is no description of the mother's face, is an illustration of the cost of reducing a person to their hands, to a source of labor power, and to the aforementioned "Handgriff." Her death renders her useless, and with the loss of her function as "Handlangerin," she loses her physical integrity even in the depiction of her dead body, ending in the description of what was the substitute for her exhausted hands to the child.

The tension between the mother as anonymous part of the construction process and the mother in her individual significance for Therese is made very concrete in how the story is framed. While in the beginning, Therese seems in control of the narrative, the end is abrupt. This is also expressed in Therese's last gesture when she lacks words upon finishing her story:

Sie wußte jede Kleinigkeit, die damals vorgefallen war jetzt nach zehn Jahren ganz genau, und weil der Anblick ihrer Mutter oben im halbfertigen Erdgeschoß das letzte Andenken an das Leben der Mutter war und sie es ihrem Freunde gar nicht genug deutlich überantworten konnte, wollte sie nach dem Schlusse ihrer Erzählung noch einmal darauf zurückkommen, stockte aber, legte das Gesicht in die Hände und sagte kein Wort mehr. (202-203)

Therese wants to frame the story in personal terms, even desperately so, but she is not able to. The supervisor who angrily yells at her mother literally has the last word.

In Therese's story, the perspective of the orphaned child clashes with that of the angry supervisor. The perspective of the orphaned child is a heightened form of showing the individual cost to the working individual. The story concentrates and bundles the tension between the views of the worker as an individual and as part of the larger machinery of production that is present throughout the novel. The emphasis on the suffering of Therese and her mother, the exploitation of the mother's hopeless situation, and the depiction of work within a story of abandonment all emphasize the human cost of the miserable and dangerous conditions that are portrayed here as desperate attempts to hold on to objects, and reach for literal as well as figurative stability and security ("Halt").

Therese's story as mise-en-abyme of Karl's story

In its tone and content, Therese's story is a separate "genre" compared to the rest of the novel. One way this is achieved is that Therese is arguably the most sympathetic character in the entirety of the novel fragment, and carefully constructed as such. She is portrayed as very innocent and childlike; she is even explicitly described as looking much younger than she is because of the hardship she has been through.¹⁰¹ And as mentioned above, the story intensifies this innocence in a doubled fashion, by showing her already innocent, childlike character as an actual child, and exacerbated further by making the vulnerable innocent child an orphan (and by announcing the death of the mother directly in the beginning, as the explicit subject of the story). The contrast with the view of the mother as an

anonymous hired hand is thus most extreme.

An additional method of intensification is that, as an embedded narrative, it takes on a parable-like character. Marked so deliberately as a story within a story, the passage seems to function as the quintessential depiction of adverse circumstances, and as such it confirms the novel's main trope, the hand, as a prime figure to convey the tension by linking it to the lost connection between mother and daughter, and the anonymity of the *Handlangerinnen*.¹⁰²

Therese's story also serves to showcase Karl's reaction to it, which itself features the same tension that is present throughout Therese's story, without Karl being aware of it. As her words fail her, Therese lays her face into her hands, and through this focus on Therese's hands when she falls silent, the narrative is brought back to Karl's perspective. Just as Karl is unable to read the hand signs in the stoker chapter, and to master the code of the frantic hand movements throughout the novel, he remains incapable to fully understand Therese's story, even though it is also a *mise-en-abyme* of his own story.

Karl himself seems to identify with the perspective of the orphaned child. He shows empathy for the workers' tough economic condition even before he is directly affected by it: Therese's being lost "in den Massenquartieren des New Yorker Ostens" and her subsequent search for shelter in overcrowded rooms is anticipated in the context of Pollunder's house, which Karl perceives as wasteful and unjust.¹⁰³ It suggests not only empathy, but also identification with the position of being an abandoned child in a precarious position.

However, Karl's social consciousness, sympathy for, and identification with Therese's story is not as absolute as it may seem; her story is introduced by a statement about her background as an illegitimate child ("Sie war ein uneheliches Kind" [97]), her father having abandoned "die abgearbeitete Frau und das schwache Kind" (97), first by leaving "Pommern" for the United States, and then by leaving for Canada without further notice. Karl, too, despite his age and his lack of agency in the decision to send him away, has abandoned his own illegitimate child and the mother.¹⁰⁴ But Karl does not make this connection. On the contrary, he uncritically relays the fact that the father is shown to at least once try to fulfill his duty by getting them to America before finally abandoning them, and equally uncritically accepts the excuse that they would have been unfindable in the mass quarters, justifying that any further action on the father's part would have been pointless anyway. During the story, Karl is looking out of the window, the exact position assumed by the uncle when Karl recites the poem of the fire, and this notion of "looking away" creates a moment of distance and disengagement that is unmistakably built into the initial sentence: "Einmal erzählte Therese—Karl stand neben ihr beim Fenster und sah auf die Straße—vom Tode ihrer Mutter" (196).

Any identification between Therese and Karl as abandoned children is thus inherently problematic, and in the context of Karl's story, Therese's story relates empathy as much as oblivion to his own role. The story thus functions both as parallel and contrast to Karl's story, emphasizing Karl's unclear position of being caught in the middle. Karl literally embodies both the abandoned child as well as the abandoning father in the story. As in the beginning, he is still caught between

capital and labor, and his reaction to Therese's story shows that he still struggles with the uncle's imperative, "Lerne deine Stellung begreifen" (50).

Instead, Karl's attention to Therese's story culminates in the gesture of Therese laying her face into her hand. Gerhard Kurz reads the gesture as ambiguous: "This could convey that she is overwhelmed by her own feelings, or it could be an expression of her desperation since she cannot reach Karl."¹⁰⁵ In either sense, in this gesture, Therese's hands literally contain the tension that is present in her own perspective and voice by containing her eyes and mouth, as well as the tension in Karl's reaction to the story. Her gesture links the hand as a trope that is conjured up by this tension with the hand as it appears in her story. It also links it back to the Heizer's story, who uses the same gesture when he feels hopeless about his situation: "Und müde setzte sich der Heizer wieder und legte das Gesicht in beide Hände" (14). Toward the end of the text, Karl himself is shown to perform this gesture; "er legte einen Augenblick lang das Gesicht in seine Hände" (339).¹⁰⁶

The work accident as expression of the tension between conflicting views of the worker

An additional layer of the tension that finds its most direct expression in Therese's story is that her mother dies as a result of a work accident, which is a culmination of the tension between conflicting views of the worker present throughout the novel. From the point of view of the child, the death is experienced

as existential, whereas from the point of view of the foreman, it is an annoying interruption but presumably a normal risk rather than the tragedy that it is for Therese. With this tension, we are in the domain of Kafka's profession at the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute. Benno Wagner calls this literary treatment of insurance themes Kafka's "doppelte Buchführung."¹⁰⁷

Liability at construction sites was the subject of Kafka's first published legal text, written in 1908, a brief titled "Umfang der Versicherungspflicht der Baugewerbe und der baulichen Nebengewerbe."¹⁰⁸ In the text, he argues for universal protection, which had recently been changed in favor of partial coverage. He addresses the fact that the current law leaves significant gaps in the coverage, since it is not individuals that are covered, but the place at which an accident occurs ("die Lage des jeweiligen Beschäftigungsortes").¹⁰⁹ Specifically, construction sites proper were covered, while associated activities at the periphery of the construction sites remained uncovered. Kafka points out that a universal coverage would make sense especially because construction work is "sehr mannigfaltig zusammengesetzt"¹¹⁰ and also somewhat fluid: "Hierzu tritt noch, daß die Arbeiter nicht selten innerhalb desselben kleinen Betriebes abwechselnd bald in die eine, bald in die andere Gefahrensphäre gelangen."¹¹¹ In Therese's story, the location of the "Handlangerinnen" work plays a role when Therese is surprised to see her mother actually climb up rather than stay next to the building site. And not only do individual workers change locations that would cover them on one site and not the other, but, as Kafka also points out, general work conditions also undergo constant change, likewise anticipating Therese's mother's fate ("daß eine Hauptquelle von

Gefahren bei Bau- und baulichen Nebengewerben eben oft der rasche Wechsel von Arbeitslokalitäten und Arbeitsbedingungen überhaupt ist”).¹¹² Therese’s story is thus a rather direct illustration of Kafka’s professional experience.

But the importance of Kafka’s work at the insurance institute for *Der Verschollene* (and the literary texts in general) is not limited to thematic connections.¹¹³ Rather, the theme of social accident insurance is deeply connected to the irreconcilable tension between the different views of the subject that is present throughout the entire novel fragment. Therese’s mother dies at an American work site, but Amerika as a fictional, hyperbolic space also serves to point to problems closer to Kafka’s and Karl’s home. Kafka knew better than almost any writer of his time that these were direct depictions of the tensions and conflicts that were present and under negotiation in Europe. In fact, it was precisely this tension that led to the institution of accident insurance and was far from being resolved—to the contrary, accident insurance was still very much in the process of establishing itself. Accident insurance contains this tension between the view of the worker (and the subject) as individual and the view of the worker as an anonymous part of the machine, as a statistical average, and Kafka was one of the main administrators having to negotiate the different views of the worker. Just as Karl remains caught between “enemy” camps, the accident insurance employee Kafka was forced daily to mediate between the often antagonistic forces that have opposing and irreconcilable views of the worker. In *Der Verschollene*, hands, such as Therese’s hands holding her face, or the stoker’s almost lifeless hand, stand out in their semiotic excess as signals of an unresolved and unresolvable tension that is also inherent within the system of

social accident insurance; there, too, the hand metonymically represents this tension in Kafka's official writings. This is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 2

“Für den Fall, dass die Finger in die Spalte kommen”: Injured Hands, Injured Subjects, and Kafka’s Accident Insurance Work

In a diary entry from 1913, Kafka asks, “Wer hat die Zauberhand, daß er sie in die Maschinerie steckte und sie würde nicht durch tausend Messer zerrissen und verstreut.”¹¹⁴ Written during his work on *Der Verschollene*, the passage takes up the motif of the threatened hand by adding the direct physical threat of the industrial accident. In the previous chapter, I have shown that the figure of the hand appears whenever there is a tension between conflicting views on the working subject, as an individual and as part of a larger economic collective, and that the hands stand out as markers of this tension. This tension manifests itself in the hand as a figure of the worker’s status (such as the stoker’s clenched fist) and in depictions of work next to machines that threaten the hand’s natural rhythm and pace, and with it the subject’s autonomy, such as the inhumanly twitching hand of the telecommunicator. In addition to these images, the work accident narrative features the hand as its primary trope for the discrepancy between different perspectives on that accident: the interruption of work by one of the “Handlangerinnen,”¹¹⁵ and the loss of a bond between mother and child, anticipated by the exhausted mother’s letting go of her daughter’s hand.

In this chapter, I argue that both the tension between these irreconcilable

perspectives on the worker as well as the specific figure of the hand that Kafka uses to depict this tension have their origin in his work at the “Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt für das Königreich Böhmen in Prag” (AUVA). The confrontation between the opposing views on the subject—that between the subject from an impersonal perspective as part of a collective, and that of the subject as an individual—was at the center of Kafka’s everyday work at the AUVA, and the emergence of accident insurance in the late nineteenth century contained this tension in its very concept. In addition to the socio-historical contexts of modern labor shown in chapter one, the theme of work can thus be linked to Kafka’s position at the AUVA, where he was not only confronted with concrete dangers of modern manual labor, but also with this tension between antagonistic ways of thinking about the worker (and the subject in general).

The hand being the quintessential organ of industrial labor, Kafka was regularly confronted with actual threats to the hand, such as hands getting caught in machines, similar to the hand in my initial quote. But in his office writings, the accident prone hand, and the hand in general, also appears as a key trope for the threats to the modern subject. In his function as the in-house author for politically and socially sensitive issues, Kafka was forced to put the problems into persuasive, compelling language, and the hand is featured in its figurative and rhetorical function as well. Kafka was deeply immersed in the insurance worldview, and operated from within the tension accompanying modern social insurance.

I first summarize research on the historical origins and development of

accident insurance and on Kafka's tasks at the AUVA. This serves as background for the analysis of one of Kafka's office writings in this chapter, as well as for my two following chapters where I also argue that the insurance work influenced the literary writing, and specifically the figure of the hand. In order to fully understand the text that I examine, and how deeply it reflects the tensions that arise in the industrial work place and the modern insurance state, I will first explain how work accidents and the concept of social insurance contain in their very concept this tension between the subject as individual and as abstract, anonymous and statistical entity. I will then lay out Kafka's tasks at the insurance company and show how he operated within the center of this tension by offering a close reading of the office text in question. Finally, after briefly linking the text back to *Der Verschollene*, I will come back to the question of the "Zauberhand" from the chapter's opening quote.

My reading of the insurance text addresses issues that haven't been treated in previous Kafka scholarship. I provide a detailed analysis of a text that Kafka wrote in his professional capacity, "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen," which is one of Kafka's most important office writings and paradigmatic for Kafka's work at the AUVA in many respects. There exists a certain asymmetry in the reception of the text: Even though the report on accident prevention is among the more often quoted office writings, there exists no thorough analysis of the text. As early as 1928, in an essay in "Die literarische Welt," Max Brod quoted excerpts of Kafka's "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen," including some of the illustrations, in order to describe Kafka's professional work at the AUVA.¹¹⁶ Klaus Wagenbach has included excerpts and illustrations from the text in his 1964

biographical collection, as well as a 1975 edition of “In der Stafkolonie” with additional materials.¹¹⁷ However, despite its relative prominence, I have not found any actual analysis of this report, other than the short but insightful comments by the editors in the commentaries of the German and English editions of Kafka’s office writings.¹¹⁸ After Brod and Wagenbach, different scholars have quoted from the text, almost all of them the same passage, as an example of Kafka’s office writings in general, but only in passing and in other contexts, without looking at the text as a whole.¹¹⁹

In general, there are very few examples of stylistic analyses of Kafka’s office writings;¹²⁰ the editors of the office writings call it a “Desiderat der sonst so emsigen Kafka-Forschung.”¹²¹ The style of Kafka’s professional insurance texts matters greatly, because especially in the field of accident prevention, the AUVA relied on public relation efforts and carefully employed rhetorical skills to achieve social change (which was also in the institute’s self-interest), and Kafka was often chosen as an author for such texts for this specific purpose.

In the accident prevention report, Kafka uses formal and stylistic methods that can be traced throughout his literary work as well. The challenges Kafka encountered as the writer of the office texts also challenged him as literary writer, not only in terms of themes and topics, but as a formal approach that pits two differing world views against one another without dissolving the tension. Kafka’s “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” features such unresolved tension through a careful and strategic staging of the figure of the hand.

Just as the figure of the hand in the literary texts hasn't been linked to questions of manual and mechanical labor, including contemporaneous hand imagery and work science, the significance of the hand in the literary texts has not been linked with Kafka's insurance work. This is true despite the fact that "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen" includes numerous drawings of hands, and despite Kafka's general preoccupation with industrial labor and accidents, of which the hand accidents that he describes in the text are an example.

By demonstrating how one of Kafka's most important and complex literary tropes deployed throughout his entire work is so closely linked to his insurance work, my chapter shows the relevance of Kafka's insurance background for *Der Verschollene* as well as later texts, where the connections are less direct but crucial nevertheless, as I explain in subsequent chapters.¹²² In order to understand the underlying conflicts and tensions that constitute the basis for Kafka's daily work, it is important to understand the origins of social work accident insurance.

1. Work Accidents and Social Insurance

The "Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt für das Königreich Böhmen in Prag" was created in 1889. As a semi-governmentally funded provider of accident insurance,¹²³ the AUVA constituted the first branch of social insurance in Austria.

The Prague office was the biggest of seven regional institutes and insured 33,000 businesses in Bohemia, “the industrial heartland of Europe.”¹²⁴

The phenomenon of social accident insurance was new, and it was the result of radical social and legal transformations and reforms that were still ongoing during Kafka’s years at the insurance. The very concept of Workmen’s Accident Insurance represented a complete renegotiation of social, economical, and political questions, and redefinitions of what the very notions of “work,” “accident,” and “insurance” had come to mean in the early twentieth century.

Accident insurance is a direct reaction to dramatic changes in work practices brought about by industrialization and increasing mechanization. At the end of the nineteenth century, German and Austrian law dealing with accidents and workers’ compensation was no longer up to date in an industrialized society. Along with the nature of work, the nature of accidents had changed dramatically. The same technology that allowed for unprecedented innovation, speed, and productivity had also led to an increase in accidents, both in terms of frequency and especially intensity. Many serious accidents were either directly or indirectly connected to the work with machines, especially steam technology and steam engines (such as the workplace of the ship stoker in *Der Verschollene*).¹²⁵

In addition to the technological changes, there were related social changes that also contributed to the shifts in work safety. During the early phases of industrialization, the majority of workers had not been in manufacturing, but came from the agrarian sector, forced to change jobs. The lack of experience and

qualification was a danger in itself.¹²⁶ In *Der Verschollene*, for example, Therese's mother, who dies from a work accident, is explicitly referred to as an unskilled worker, or "Handlangerin."¹²⁷ Lack of experience with the new technology remained a problem that was exacerbated by constant innovation and technological progress. Many techniques to protect workers were simply not known, or, where newly known, the question of their high cost made employers decide against their implementation. Advocating for such preventative measures would become one of Kafka's most important tasks.

Despite the fact that accidents had increased so drastically in both quality and quantity, there was no adequate legal or social system in place that would take into account these changed work conditions and address the new situation adequately. Compensation for work accidents was a complicated legal issue and a tedious and costly process.

From a "fault" to a "no-fault" system of compensation

Particularly unpractical and problematic was the fact that until the end of the nineteenth century, German and Austrian liability law ("Haftpflichtgesetz") was based on the notion of individual responsibility.¹²⁸ Under such a principle of fault ("Schuldprinzip"), the burden of proof would lie with the individual. A worker who wanted to be compensated for injuries sustained on the job had to prove the fault on the part of the employer. If he died, his wife or family would have to prove fault in

order to receive compensation. If another employee, such as a foreman, caused the accident, it had to be proved that the employer committed a fault by hiring him. Any possible fault thus needed to be proved under strict regulations, with “an array of expert witnesses and procedures (‘Sachverständige,’ ‘Zeugen,’ ‘Urkunden,’ ‘Eide’)

and resulted in large amounts of money being consumed with little left to compensate the victim,”¹²⁹ even if the “fault” were ultimately established. The very laws that were supposed to protect the workers could thus easily be turned against them, and very often were.

The principle of fault also had become problematic in its underlying worldview. A law based on individual fault operates under the assumption that “the conduct of individuals in everyday life would not *normally*, i. e. as a matter of course, produce accidents.”¹³⁰ Rather, such a notion of fault attributes accidents “to a fault of conduct on the part of an individual who disturbs an otherwise harmonious order.”¹³¹ The concept of a harmonious order that only produces accidents when disturbed through individual misconduct was irreconcilable with the nature and increased amount of accidents that came with industrialization. Social insurance is therefore based on the opposite concept, which “not only dispenses with the need to prove fault, but with the very notion of fault.”¹³² Instead, a form of “automatic compensation from a collectively and equitably funded system” would be provided.¹³³

This meant that accident insurance would operate on the basis of a radically new concept of dealing with questions of guilt, fault, and responsibility. In a system

of mutuality, “the accident is no longer seen in moral terms, but rather as the cost of living in mass society.”¹³⁴ Anson Rabinbach describes the accident as “the crucial point at which social and political forces first confronted each other to determine responsibility for the personal costs of industrialization.”¹³⁵ Instead of being the result of a mistake, work now contained an occupational risk, a concept that “provided for an entirely new set of rights and obligations in the workplace.”¹³⁶ As a consequence, the notion of fault and of what constitutes an accident went through a dramatic transformation.

The collection of statistical data made it possible to demonstrate the regularity in the occurrence of accidents, with the result of viewing such accidents as “part of the normal course of modern collective society.”¹³⁷ Statistics thus led to a radical change in the view of accidents; as Rabinbach argues, “Emerging from the confines of the laboratory, knowledge could prove that an accident was neither a willful act on the part of the worker nor the result of a malevolent entrepreneur, but a statistical fact.”¹³⁸ The accident was now viewed as a normal and expected result of physiological responses to the increase in work pace and quantity. Likewise, statistics allowed the institution of accident insurance to become an economically rational practice.

Conflicting views of the subject and its body: The individual and the statistical average

The method of statistical analysis, and the new notions of fault and accident, led to important shifts in how the individual worker is viewed. By accepting the occurrence of accidents as a regularity rather than an irregularity, and therefore as the norm, the accident moves away from the worker as individual to the worker in his statistical function. Accident insurance from this perspective shifts the focus from the health of the individual to the health of the state, from the individual body to the organism of the state. Accidents have become normal by being regular and predictable.¹³⁹ Benno Wagner emphasizes the statistical dimension and how it affects the view of the modern subject: "Der Mensch der Unfallversicherung ist weder physiologisches Individuum noch rationales Subjekt, sondern ein Komplex von Datensätzen (Alter, Geschlecht, Wohnort, Größe, Nationalität, Krankheitsgeschichte)."¹⁴⁰ Rabinbach notes that as a result of these changes, "the state, armed with the irrefutable truths of science, and perched above rival interests, could ensure surveillance of the workplace, reduce accidents, and resolve some of the pressing dilemmas of industrial work and labor conflict."¹⁴¹

But while the creation of partially state-funded social insurance certainly improved working conditions and accident compensation significantly, it brought with it a new view of the individual subject, and a new dimension of control. The intervention and collection of statistical data created the conditions to control not only the political,¹⁴² but the social and economical stability of the state as well.

Burrow summarizes: “Human life had been discovered as a capital worth protecting. Individuals had become politically objectified and integrated into the security plans of the state through the use of statistical tables.”¹⁴³

Wagner singles out statistical data collection—which itself relied on technological innovation in the form of Herman Hollerith’s invention of the electric tabulating machine—as the origin of drastic increases in control through the state:

Die umfassende Verdichtung immer differenzierterer Tatsachen und Aspekte des menschlichen Zusammenlebens - mithin die Erfindung des Sozialen als Dispositiv effektiver Kontrollmacht - erfährt durch die von Herman Hollerith erfundene und 1889 erstmals praktisch eingesetzte elektrische Zählmaschine eine ungeahnte Beschleunigung und Präzisierung, die als control revolution in die Geschichte moderner Regierungsmacht eingehen wird.¹⁴⁴

Statistics allow for this kind of pervasive control of the population as a whole by the modern state, and accident insurance relies heavily on such data, which Wagner points out by linking such state surveillance to Foucault’s concept of “bio-power”:

Kafkas Tätigkeitsfeld als Versicherungsbeamter befindet sich exakt an jenem Kreuzungspunkt zwischen der Disziplinierung des physiologischen Körpers des Individuums und der Regulierung des statistischen Körpers der Bevölkerung, der nach Foucault den Ursprung der Biomacht bezeichnet.¹⁴⁵

Control over the statistical body of the population is inseparable from control of the individual body, and Kafka works at the intersection of both. Bernhard Dotzler likewise sees Kafka’s profession as linked to the concept of “bio-power”¹⁴⁶ which he points out functions “versicherungsartig,”¹⁴⁷ and he refers to Kafka as a

“hauptberuflicher Experte für Bio-Verwaltung.”¹⁴⁸

Kafka learned about statistics even before he began working at the AUVA. As a law student at Charles University, he attended Heinrich Rauchberg’s statistics lectures, such as “Allgemeine und österreichische Statistik,”¹⁴⁹ and continued to follow the lectures Rauchberg gave at the AUVA.¹⁵⁰ In the statistical worldview of accident insurance, the insured worker is no longer just an individual subject, but, as Wagner points out by referring to the Belgian statistician and astronomer Adolphe Quételet, “Durchschnittsmensch.”¹⁵¹

Thus, the state intervention has a multitude of consequences that threaten the political and physical boundaries of the subject: In the case of the worker, this means that his physical integrity is subordinated to the integrity of the larger organism of which he is a part. And, as Rabinbach points out, these developments also led to a restructuring of knowledge “along different social and political axes” and brought a sphere that was considered private into the public:¹⁵² “By opening the factory to the scrutiny of these competing discourses, the workplace became the scene of empirical investigation, legal theorizing, statistical review, juridical decision, and medical supervision.”¹⁵³ In his function at the AUVA, Kafka was situated in the center of these competing discourses. In his literary texts, Kafka takes this pervasiveness of the personal supervision a step further by having representatives of these spheres visit his protagonists in their bedrooms and homes. For Josef K., this means court officers in his bedroom, and for Gregor Samsa, a boss checking if he really is too sick to work.¹⁵⁴ In *Der Verschollene*, too, these spheres are

constantly intermingled, especially in Brunelda's apartment, where Delamarche threatens Karl with legal consequences should he try to leave by handing him over to police, or Karl suspecting Robinson of simulating illness to get out of his work duties.

The emergence of social insurance, through its rational, quantifiable view of accidents, the collection of data, and the restructuring of knowledge, brings with it a shift in conceptions of the subject. François Ewald, chronicler of the insurance state, describes this phenomenon as a

conversion process in mental attitudes towards not only justice and responsibility, but also time, causality, destiny, desert and providence. All man's relations with himself or herself, with others and the world are overturned. With insurance and its philosophy, one enters a universe where . . . society becomes the general arbiter answerable for the causes of our destiny.¹⁵⁵

"All man's relations with himself or herself, with others and the world are overturned"—accident insurance fundamentally affects the idea of man and the idea of the human subject, who loses a certain amount of autonomy in exchange for the safety that the emerging social state provides. Ewald sees in this change a new social contract which Wagner describes as the "Einsicht, dass der als soziales Risiko (als Unfall-, Krankheits-, Alters-Risiko), verstandene Mensch *von Geburt an* in einem unauflöslichen Schuldverhältnis zur Gesellschaft stehe."¹⁵⁶

The notions of fault and accident were thus going through a radical transformation during Kafka's time, and as an employee of the AUVA, Kafka actively

participated in the transition to replace the system of individual fault or responsibility with a “no fault” system of mutuality, as I will show in my next section. But while accident insurance has done away with the notion of individual fault, there is an individual debt to society (fault and debt being semantically related in German in the charged concept of “Schuld,” which appears in virtually every one of Kafka’s literary texts). Burrow argues that Kafka’s protagonists are often stuck in a system of individual fault, the system that Kafka professionally fought against. But even if imagined within the reformed system, it could be this other, new “Schuldverhältnis” of being a statistical liability and probability that makes the lives of Kafka’s protagonists complicated, and themselves “schuldig”: In a society where the concept of individual fault is abolished (as is the case in the civil laws that allow for the institution of accident insurance), everybody is equally innocent, but also equally guilty. This is the case of many Kafka characters who lack the association with any obvious crime, and whose guilt often consists in simply being guilty.¹⁵⁷

2. Kafkas work at the AUVA as administrator of the insured body

Ewalds description of the creation of an insurance state as a development in which “man’s relations with himself or herself, with others and the world are overturned” is also a valid description of Kafka’s everyday work life at the AUVA. As

an accident insurance company in the foundational years of social accident insurance, the AUVA was amidst transitioning legal systems, from compensation based on individual cases to a system of mutuality, and from a system of fault to one of no fault. Kafka was confronted on a daily basis with legal and administrative problems that were emerging in this transition. Kafka worked at the AUVA almost for his entire professional career. After studying law at Charles University in Prague, and after an obligatory court internship (“Referendariat”), he briefly joined the Prague branch of the private Italian insurance company Assicurazioni Generali. He began working at the AUVA in the summer of 1908 and remained at the company until his retirement in 1922. He was quickly, and repeatedly, promoted and towards the end was in the second-highest position of his department. From the beginning, he was held in high esteem by his superiors, Robert Marschner and Eugen Pfohl.

In his work at the institute, Kafka proved to be a “significant shaper of industrial reforms in early twentieth century Bohemia.”¹⁵⁸ This is still a somewhat unusual image of Kafka, and, to an extent, one of his own making when one considers his self-fashioning in the autobiographical writings. Especially in his diary entries, Kafka often pitted the insurance work against his existence as a writer, and Max Brod’s 1928 essay about Kafka’s work at the AUVA also describes Kafka’s attitude towards his job as one of resentment, quoting Kafka’s diary.¹⁵⁹ However, Ruth Gross convincingly argues that the negative depiction of the office work as taking energy away from his literary writing is specifically a sign “that in many ways his *Beruf* and anti-*Beruf* were one and the same,” both consisting in the work of writing.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, Stanley Corngold argues “that Kafka’s legal and publicistic

activity shares *a mode of being* with his fictional activity.”¹⁶¹ The sheer importance of Kafka’s office writings might have weighed on his literary writing, as Corngold, Jack Greenberg and Benno Wagner point out: “He wrote his prose poetry, not after a day’s restful-restive finger exercises at an anonymous office but typically after writing or dictating briefs of considerable intricacy and social importance.”¹⁶²

The importance of Kafka’s work at the AUVA is present throughout his letters, though often somewhat ironically understated. For example, he repeatedly complained that his superiors took credit for his writings, such as in letters to Felice Bauer or to his uncle, Alfred Löwy. But he also regularly wrote proudly about texts he authored in his professional capacity and sent out samples of his writings to Felice and others, including the text presented in this chapter.¹⁶³ In an attempt to see photographs of Felice’s office, he suggests a bargain, playfully offering up his own “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” in return:

Bekomme ich die Ansicht der Bürolokalitäten? Wenn ich sie bekomme, bekommst Du z.B. einen Jahresbericht unserer Anstalt mit einem Aufsatz von mir über runde Sicherheitshobelmesserwellen! Mit Abbildungen! . . . Liebste, es stehn Dir noch viele Freuden bevor.¹⁶⁴

In the first years, Kafka’s tasks were centered around two areas, risk classification (“Gefahrenklasseneinreihung”) and accident prevention (“Unfallverhütung”), both fields that required knowledge of the quantity and extent of injuries. Work injuries, injuries of the human body, and the legal, social, and economical status of the injured individual were thus a direct part of Kafka’s work responsibilities, which gave him direct contact with the realities of industrial work

in northern Bohemia. The text “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” is an example from the area of accident prevention, but I will show that it also reflects his other area, risk classification.

Risk classification and the quantification of injury

“Gefahrenklasseneinreihung” consisted in classifying factories and companies according to categories of danger and determining premiums accordingly. Kafka was assigned four regions in northern Bohemia (Reichenberg, Gablonz, Friedland and Rumburg), all of which were heavily industrialized — Klaus Wagenbach refers to the area as “das Manchester Böhmens”.¹⁶⁵

For his work in risk classification of factories and businesses, Kafka regularly had to fight employers who were “falsifying reported salaries and underfunding their employees’ insurance plans.”¹⁶⁶ He dealt with large numbers of appeals from these employers and the ensuing legal conflicts, lengthy trials that consisted of a series of interpretations of the very letter of the law in question,¹⁶⁷ another familiar theme in his literary texts.

In his position toward the businesses, Kafka “found himself in the middle of a battle between these forces attempting to implement the principle of mutuality . . . and those who resisted such attempts as attacks on their privileges as members of certain social hierarchies.”¹⁶⁸ In many ways such a position in the “middle of a battle” is characteristic for Kafka’s insurance work, since the AUVA was situated

precisely between the interests of the employers and the employees. Occupying this middle position was often a thankless task, because it meant that the insurance company was regularly attacked by both parties (workers claiming insufficient compensation, or employers complaining that the premiums were too high). The same middle position was found in Kafka's other area of expertise, accident prevention, which I will discuss further in the next section.¹⁶⁹

Moreover, Kafka was also in a middle position in the transition to a new form of viewing the individual subject within the universe of social insurance. Kafka had to operate in the middle ground between protecting the body of the individual and the larger organism and economic health of the state. In having to categorize businesses and assign premiums according to "Gefahrenklassen," by calculating and predicting accidents based on statistics and translating them into monetary value, he participated in the larger project of quantifying potential injuries, acting as an administrator of the human body. Kafka also found himself right in the middle of a battle between the concepts of the human subject as individual and as statistical figure, with all the tensions that this confrontation entails. In this mediating role, Kafka had to deal with the body of Quételet's "Durchschnittsmensch," the average statistical subject. A passage from a letter to Max Brod from 1909 reflects the somewhat unnatural, grotesque position of being the administrator of such disasters. Kafka's note from the office explains why he may have to cancel a social engagement that evening:

Denn was ich zu tun habe! In meinen vier Bezirkshauptmannschaften fallen –

von meinen übrigen Arbeiten abgesehen – wie betrunken die Leute von den Gerüsten herunter, in die Maschinen hinein, alle Balken kippen um, alle Böschungen lockern sich, alle Leitern rutschen aus, was man hinauf gibt, das stürzt hinunter, was man herunter gibt, darüber stürzt man selbst. Und man bekommt Kopfschmerzen von diesen jungen Mädchen in den Porzellanfabriken, die unaufhörlich mit Türmen von Geschirr sich auf die Treppen werfen.¹⁷⁰

This enumeration mimics the style of trade inspectors' reports that Kafka was required to read on a regular basis and that consisted of gruesome statistical enumerations of accidents and fatalities.¹⁷¹ Kafka's passage sounds eerily similar to the accident statistics of reports that summarize in one paragraph the entirety of accidents that had occurred over the course of several months in the respective geographical region, but the satirical tone brings out a certain absurdity in dealing with the "average" rather than individual subject, and thus portrays the practical limits of the insurance's social intervention. The accident of Therese's mother in *Der Verschollene*, where objects pile up on the mother after her fall, can be considered an echo of this series of endless falls, but in a more serious tone.

Kafka, in his function at the AUVA, was constantly confronted with these limits and was continuously pushing them towards the benefit of workers, through social reform and by propagating accident prevention. But by dealing with accidents that were considered normal and regular occurrences, he was reminded on a daily basis of the human cost, the discrepancies between the individual subject and the statistical body, his own participation as an administrator of the "Durchschnittsmensch," and the limits of the construct that is modern social accident insurance.

In Kafka's hyperbolic account in the letter to Max Brod, the accidents consist of entire bodies falling "in die Maschinen hinein"—the accident is not limited to one part of the body. And while hopefully not quite as drastically as in Kafka's grotesque description, injuries could indeed affect a worker's entire body and were most certainly not limited to hands. However, the hands as the physical intersection of the human body and the machine are most exposed and vulnerable to injury, so that a whole body falling into a machine is a logical continuation of statements such as this one, from an AUVA report in 1909:

Bei dem Betriebe einer Häckselschneidemaschine kam ein Arbeiter mit der rechten Hand in die Schneidemeser. Im Zuge der gegen den Besitzer der betreffenden Landwirtschaft eingeleiteten Strafverfahrens erlegte derselbe zur Ausgleichung der gegen ihn gerichteten Schadensersatzansprüche den Betrag von K 2000, -."¹⁷²

This example quantifies the worth of a hand, and Kafka had to deal with such examples on a regular basis. But his professional encounters with hands go beyond regularly reading such accounts. Even in Kafka's office writings, hands appear as particularly expressive figures.¹⁷³ In the text I analyze in the following section, Kafka describes in detail the dangers that hands are exposed to, but the text is also an account of what the institution of social accident insurance can and cannot do to protect workers' bodies, and hands are carefully staged as a figure for these limits in this text.

3. Kafka's "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen" as balancing act between individual body and economic organism

Kafka's report "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen," written in 1910 for the AUVA's yearly report for 1909, can be considered a paradigmatic text amidst his office writings. It is an example of Kafka's efforts for accident prevention. Like risk classification, accident prevention is a careful act of balance.¹⁷⁴ Here, too, Kafka had to act as middleman between individual fate and abstract statistics. But unlike risk classification, accident prevention was not a question of legislation and social reform; it was the AUVA's own initiative to improve safety and work conditions through public relations efforts, including sections in the yearly reports. The following text is an example of such an initiative. The specific issue that he discusses in the report, implementing safety features in wood-planing machines, "became one of Kafka's most important official concerns"¹⁷⁵ and grew into a larger enterprise.¹⁷⁶ The report thus documents the area where Kafka left, within his insurance work, his most important legacy.¹⁷⁷

The text showcases the role of the AUVA and its employees as middlemen between workers and business owners. Leo Verkauf, the leading expert for social insurance among the Social Democrats, had attacked the Austrian insurance companies for their bureaucratic lack of reform in the field of accident prevention, whereas Austrian trade associations had argued for autonomy from those same

“bureaucrats”.¹⁷⁸ The report exemplifies the position of the AUVA, and Kafka as its employee, as intermediary between these interest groups. The report also negotiates between opposing views of the worker: either as an individual who needs to be protected from bodily harm, or as part of a larger statistical picture that accepts accidents as a quantifiable risk in order to set insurance premiums. The text also illustrates the discrepancies between the concepts of fault and the no-fault system of risk under which accident insurance operates, as well as the shifts from a principle of individuality to that of mutuality. Finally, the text shows most directly how the experiences at the AUVA may in fact be the origin of the hand as Kafka’s trope of choice for this tension, as this report is a text where Kafka describes in detail what can happen to hands that are in proximity of machines. The report thus is a particularly poignant example of Kafka’s direct confrontation with hand injuries and hands. And in addition to the literal, concrete hands, hands are used “strategically” within a decisively rhetorical exploration of the topic.

Kafka as ghostwriter for politically sensitive issues

Kafka was asked to author texts whenever strong rhetorical skills were needed, and the report itself reflects this. Not surprisingly, Kafka’s superiors had quickly recognized Kafka’s writing skills (and, to a certain extent were aware of his literary writing), and early on he was assigned to write important documents such as yearbook reports, speeches, and newspaper articles. Benno Wagner refers to Kafka as the “special agent for Marschner’s reform projects” and as his superiors’

“ghostwriter.”¹⁷⁹ Kafka thus dealt with sensitive topics where the particular writing style was a vehicle for social and political causes, and he had creative autonomy in the process. These writing projects can be seen as a source for a specifically literary engagement with these social issues, including the use of the hand as a trope for the tension created by the insurance worldview in addition to the confrontation with hand injuries.

It is also acknowledged at the beginning of the report itself that it is the presentation that is new, not the subject matter, since Kafka’s report is preceded by a reference to an earlier report from 1908¹⁸⁰ in which the AUVA had initially brought up the innovation they were hoping to implement: the introduction of cylindrical safety shafts in wood-planing machines.¹⁸¹ The fact that it is a “mere” repetition is significant because it shows that the task Kafka was asked to perform was that of rephrasing the topic in a way that would catch the reader’s attention for a voluntary improvement of worker safety—one that at this point could not be legally enforced. The text is thus a specifically rhetorical intervention for which Kafka was required to review the technical and social issue in terms of creating a compelling narrative. (And in fact, Kafka did not only have the rhetorical, but also the technical skills to describe these mechanical details after taking classes, in 1909, at the “Deutsche technische Hochschule” to further his technological knowledge.¹⁸²) He acknowledges the need for a convincing summary himself when he writes in the report:

“Es wäre nur noch zu wünschen, daß auch die Fachzeitschriften sich mit der runden Welle mehr befassen, denn nach dem gegenwärtigen Stande der Dinge

hat es tatsächlich den Anschein, als ob es nur einer letzten zusammenfassenden, in alle beteiligten Kreise dringenden Darstellung bedürfe, um in kurzer Zeit die runde Welle zu einer allgemeinen Einrichtung zu machen (195).¹⁸³

The fact that Kafka's task was the stylistic and rhetorical improvement also suggests that a careful analysis of the report is warranted.

It is particularly noteworthy in this context that the report is the first publication by the Bohemian AUVA institute, and in fact by any of the five Austrian insurance institutes, to provide illustrations. The report therefore marks an important "media innovation"¹⁸⁴ by adding visuals to technical descriptions and numbers, and thus adding the "suggestive power"¹⁸⁵ of the image to the rhetorical techniques. "Man möchte annehmen, daß die mediale Modernisierung der Prager 'Unfallverhütungspropaganda' auf einen Vorschlag Kafkas zurückging, gewissermaßen seinen Kunstverstand," write Hermsdorf and Wagner;¹⁸⁶ as supportive evidence for the editors' tentative assumption one can also count Kafka's later report on stone quarries, where photographs are included, which was likewise a path-breaking innovation in the genre.¹⁸⁷ To draw attention to Kafka's text, and specifically the illustrations, a note was added to mailed copies of the yearly report:

Im Zuge der Bestrebungen, die Zahl und die Folgen der Unfälle durch entsprechende Maßregeln einzuschränken, hat die Anstalt diesmal im Berichte die Vorteile der Verwendung der Rundwelle bei den Holzbearbeitungsmaschinen durch entsprechende Illustrationen zur Darstellung gebracht. Wir empfehlen besonders dieses Moment den Herren Interessenten zur gefälligen Beachtung."¹⁸⁸

The function of the images goes beyond that of mere technical illustrations, as I will show. They are part of the same strategy to get the reader's attention that led to Kafka's authorship of the text.¹⁸⁹

Creating a "neutral" position

The concrete goal of the text is to convince business owners to change a component of their technical equipment. The special challenge is that at this point in time, accident prevention in general, including this implementation of a safer cylindrical shaft in wood-planing machines, was entirely voluntary and could not be legally enforced. It was also particularly difficult to convince the employers of the need for accident prevention, because, as I have shown in the first section of this chapter, the concept of accident insurance explicitly accepts the existence of risk and bases its premiums on it—premiums that the companies that receive the publication are already paying.

Because accident prevention was not obligatory and the AUVA could not prescribe it, and because safety alone could not be the only argument for employers and business owners, Kafka presents accident prevention as a natural development rather than a deliberate intervention right in the beginning of the text:

Endlich schreitet die Einführung der runden Sicherheitswellen für Holzhobelmaschinen in günstiger Weise fort. Hiefür bürgt der Zirkularerlass der k. k. Statthalterei an die k. k. Bezirkshauptmannschaften betreffend die Einführung der Sicherheitswellen, sowie die Stellungnahme der k. k. Gewerbeinspektorate, welche mehr und mehr auf Verwendung dieser Wellen

dringen und endlich die Tatsache, daß bereits eine ganze Anzahl von Unternehmern mit derartigen Wellen arbeitet und sich in sehr günstiger Weise—die schutztechnische Bedeutung wurde niemals in Abrede gestellt—auch über die praktische Verwendbarkeit der runden Wellen ausgesprochen hat. (194)

He skillfully turns the lack of implementation up to this point into a gradual, slow but steady success story, one that his report, it seems, merely registers, rather than promotes—a success story he presents to the reader for his own best interest, as a friendly reminder and a service that the AUVA provides for their clients. The mediating position of the AUVA is present throughout the text. From the outset, Kafka creates a balance by reminding the reader that the government has some authority in the process (the three references to the “k. k.” agencies), while managing to let the implementation of the change seem like an obvious practical and economical choice—the adoption of the technology by an increasing number of businesses that have already (“bereits”) adopted the circular shaft for practical reasons is presented as a “natural” development of the market, rather than an intervention into it. He brings in the safety feature through an interjection, seemingly downplaying it and syntactically subordinating it to the practical aspects, but emphasizing it nevertheless, underlining that it is undeniably the safer choice.

Kafka makes sure that the AUVA appears as an observer rather than an agent of change. But once the “neutral” position of the observer has been established, he carefully alludes to the negative consequences of not switching to the cylindrical shafts:

Es ist daher die begründete Hoffnung vorhanden, daß in absehbarer Zeit die runden Wellen eine derartige Verbreitung werden gewonnen haben, daß für die Einreihung eines Betriebes Nichtverwendung dieser Wellen als Merkmal für eine über das Normale erhöhte Gefahr wird bewertet werden können. (194–5)

Soon, the cylindrical shafts “will have gained” widespread distribution. The use of the future II tense suggests a successful and complete implementation, a completion that has not even remotely taken place yet. Making the product itself the grammatical subject and agent underlines the “natural” development. The present problem of companies not implementing the change is phrased as their having “not yet” made the change. Not being in a position to directly penalize the use of the rectangular shafts, Kafka shifts the focus on the disadvantages of the “Nichtverwendung” of the round shafts. Thus, not changing the equipment is not just remaining passive, it is an active choice of not implementing the change.

Kafka then expresses the “hope” that soon, the Nichtverwendung will indicate “eine über das Normale erhöhte Gefahr.” Through the use of “Gefahr” (danger, or risk), this phrase contains an allusion to Kafka’s other field of expertise, “Gefahrenklasseneinteilung,” or risk assessment. Referring to the grade that AUVA employees give to the companies in order to determine their premiums, it contains an implicit threat for an indirect way to penalize the “Nichtverwendung” by increasing the premiums due to an above average risk classification. For this purpose, the buzzword “Gefahr,” which will elicit in the intended readership the connection to risk assessment and monetary consequences, is repeated throughout the text, and the risk of injury appears as quasi-personified and concrete, corporeal

danger.

However, “eine über das Normale erhöhte Gefahr” is also at least partly phrased as a concession to business owners; calling the regular occurrence of accidents “das Normale” reinforces the fact that nobody expects anything other than the *normal*, expected amount of accidents (and not an elimination or complete prevention of accidents). This is a formulation that directly pertains to one of the paradigmatic changes in how accidents are viewed in the statistical universe of social insurance: the shift from seeing the accident as an abnormality and seeking fault or explanation of responsibility to explicitly accepting an average amount of accidents. While “Gefahr” is an allusion to a concrete risk classification grade, it is also acknowledged that it is not an absolute term, but a relative one: “eine über das Normale erhöhte Gefahr.” The term contains the notion of danger, a danger that should be avoided, or prevented, but it is the same word that is used in contexts of “risk,” containing the acceptance of a certain degree of danger. “Gefahr” is a key concept in this text, and it is important to read it in these contexts.

The introduction of the report concludes by stating that in addition to being safe, the cylindrical shafts’ ultimate advantage is their economical superiority. It is therefore made explicit that their implementation is not an appeal to the employers’ sociopolitical conscience, but a purely practical matter:

Dies hat seinen Grund vor allem darin, daß die runde Welle unter den schutztechnischen Einrichtungen eine ganz besondere Stellung einnimmt, da sie abgesehen von ihrer schutztechnischen Wirkung, die überdies eine vollkommene ist, auch noch eine ganze Anzahl anderer Vorteile in sich vereinigt, indem sie im Grunde billiger ist als die Vierkantwelle, überdies

billiger arbeitet und endlich auch besser arbeitet, so dass ihre Einführung an das sozialpolitische Verständnis der Unternehmer nicht einmal Anforderungen stellt, sondern schon dem bloß praktischen Blick sich sofort empfiehlt. (195)

“[D]em bloß praktischen Blick sich sofort empfiehlt”—it is not the AUVA that recommends the cylindrical shafts. Rather, it is the shaft that recommends itself to anyone with a “practical point of view.”¹⁹⁰ After repeating three times how safe it is, in three separate subordinate clauses, Kafka shifts to the extreme of reassuring employers that it is specifically *not* the safety aspect that would warrant the change. After an ostentatious affirmation that the suggestion to prevent work accidents would not add to the companies’ expenses, but is fully justified by economic self-interest, he specifies that this means their socio-political judgment is not even (“nicht einmal”) called upon. Yet, by bringing it up, Kafka indirectly suggests that it can and should be justified socio-politically as well, covering both practical/rational as well as moral reasons.¹⁹¹

Staging a battle of hand vs. risk

After the introductory *captatio benevolentiae*, the report shifts to the description of technical details and hand injuries, depicted as a confrontation between the antagonists “Gefahr” and “Hand.” First, “Gefahr” is given the stage:

Die Messer der Vierkantwelle (Abbildung 1), direkt durch Schrauben an der Welle befestigt, drehen sich mit ihrer nackten Schneide bei 3800-4000 Umdrehungen in der Minute. Die Gefahren, die für den Arbeiter durch den großen Abstand zwischen Messerwelle und Tischfläche entstehen, treten

deutlich hervor. (195)

The “Gefahren,” beginning and subject in the sentence that introduced them, “treten deutlich hervor,” seemingly speaking for themselves but making at the same time an almost theatrical appearance.¹⁹² The vivid description is not only complemented by a drawing, but Kafka also prescribes the appropriate reaction to the drawing by stating how easily recognizable such risks are. The reader finds himself amidst a setting with blades and their “exposed cutting edges” that “spin at 3800-4000 revolutions per minute,”¹⁹³ and the reference to the “Vierkantwelle” in figure 1 is placed amidst those revolving knives.

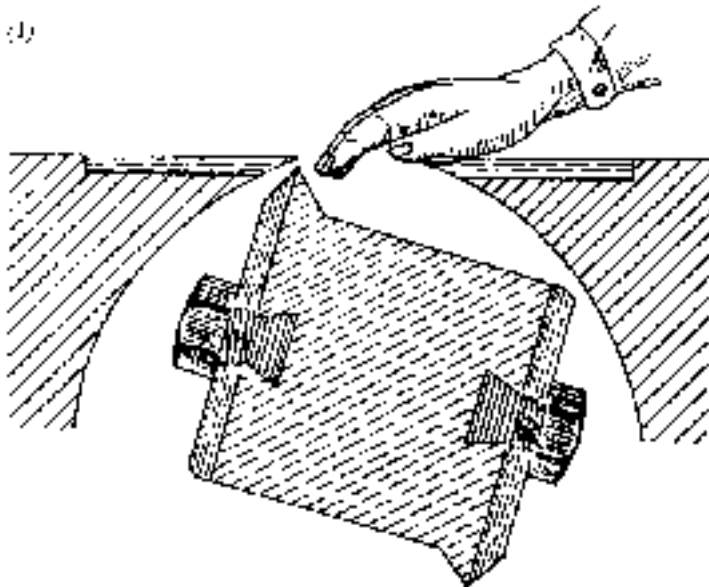


Figure 1: “Abbildung 1,” “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” (195)

The first image is introduced as an illustration of the “Vierkantwelle.” It

shows an intact hand in a situation that is described as dangerous. The hand reaching towards the machine in itself creates a miniature narrative by provoking an uneasy anticipation of what is to follow, precisely because the hand is still intact. A reader might see the occasional injured hand as a necessary consequence, but showing the intact hand makes this transformation more dramatic, and more preventable. It also shows the personal agency in the decision between preventing injury and letting it, even making it, happen, and potentially challenges any instincts to intervene that may exist. No longer dealing with an abstract notion of a potentially injured body of an anonymous, average, and statistical workforce, the process of injury becomes concrete and personal through a "before" and "after" picture of the actual, physical consequences. Right after stating that no socio-political sentiments even have to be appealed to, the image of the threatened body, the threatened hand, stands in for any socially motivated argumentation. Mentioning the "naked" blades evokes the danger to the naked hand and creates a tangible sense of unease. Keeping this hand in the precarious situation is thus presented as a counterintuitive, conscious decision. The image suspends the moment of danger, making a reader literally waiting for an accident to happen by creating a still image of something that usually happens unintentionally, fast—accidentally. By halting the action, it makes it seem preventable, and makes the non-prevention a decision that allows the accident to happen.

The tale of the death by work accident of Therese's mother in *Der Verschollene* is a narrative equivalent to this setting. By announcing the death of the mother in the introductory sentence of the story within the story, Kafka creates an

uneasy atmosphere of waiting for that accident to happen, and points to the missed chances of intervention and prevention, as I have shown in the previous chapter. It is also a very similar setting to “Auf der Galerie,” where an observer is caught in a position between intervening and accepting an accident risk.

Keeping the focus on the “Gefahr” and the hands as its antagonists, the text continues with an elaboration of accident causes and concepts, taking up key problems that are connected to the emergence of social insurance, perhaps appealing to older notions of fault and responsibility (of the employee who operates carelessly) that employers may still hold. Kafka here gives a Kafka-worthy description of any possible facet of “guilt” that could be held against the workers:

An diesen Wellen wurde daher entweder gearbeitet in Unkenntnis der Gefahr, die dann womöglich noch größer wurde, oder es wurde im Bewußtsein einer ununterbrochenen Gefahr gearbeitet, die sich nicht vermeiden ließ. Ein äußerst vorsichtiger Arbeiter konnte wohl darauf achten, dass bei der Arbeit, also bei dem Hinwegführen des Holzstückes über den Hobelmesserkopf kein Fingerglied über das Arbeitsstück hinaus vorstand, aber die Hauptgefahr spottete jeder Vorsicht. Selbst die Hand des vorsichtigsten Arbeiters mußte in die Messerspalte geraten beim Abrutschen, bezw. bei dem nicht selten vorkommenden Zurückschleudern des Holzes, wenn er mit der einen Hand das zu hobelnde Stück auf den Maschinentisch aufdrückte und es mit der anderen Hand der Messerwelle zuführte. (195-6)

The question of responsibility should, strictly speaking, not even be taken into account in the “no fault” system of work accident compensation, but Kafka’s description highlights the absolute impossibility to work safely with the rectangular shaft, so that the accident must be seen as the only possible and logical consequence, well above any morally or economically acceptable norm. By addressing the

worker's potential responsibility for this outcome, Kafka proves that the question should not even be asked, because the answers are unfavorable to the factory owner and the outcomes are presented as unavoidable. Kafka here anticipates and simultaneously renders irrelevant any counterargument claiming the worker's fault or agency in the accident. One has to keep in mind that the recipients of the AUVA yearbooks were also business owners whom Kafka encountered when giving talks on accident prevention, and who on these occasions would dismiss the very idea of accident prevention measures by making it the worker's responsibility. An article from the *Gablonzer Zeitung* about one of these events quotes a business owner's angry counterargument to Kafka's lecture that the best accident prevention measure would be for workers to simply pay better attention ("Gedanken und Augen bei der Arbeit, das sei der beste Schutz gegen jeden Unfall").¹⁹⁴ From the opposition between potentially responsible employers and employees, the antagonism is now between "Hauptgefahr" and "die Hand des vorsichtigsten Arbeiters." Here, too, the grammatical subject switches back from the worker to the "Hauptgefahr," which makes an appearance as an almost personified presentation of danger, risk, and any possible safety hazard. It actively "mocks" any attempt at caution ("die Hauptgefahr spottete jeder Vorsicht"), and as a result, "[s]elbst die Hand des vorsichtigsten Arbeiters mußte in die Messerspalte geraten."

As stated initially, this passage has been quoted by Max Brod and Klaus Wagenbach and, in passing, by several other critics. Even though for several critics it serves as an example of the general style of Kafka's office writings, it is, in its emphatic style, not the most typical passage.¹⁹⁵ The observation of the style is

relevant in this analysis independent from a focus on the literary nature of the office writings—the rhetorical power is increased exactly where there is a need for it, by letting “danger” make its impressive appearance and counting on it to stand in for convincing the reader where more direct, legal consequences cannot be implemented. Placing the emphasis on “Gefahr” and “Hauptgefahr,” making these concepts the actors and agents, moves the reader’s attention away from the question of guilt, responsibility, and liability. But it also repeats the key word “Gefahr,” which, as “risk” can be translated back into the quantifiable measure of the insurance premium. The personified danger here is therefore an effective illustration of the initial admonition that the non-implementation of the change may ultimately lead to higher premiums, as soon as the new standard makes the old device cause a statistical deviation of “eine über das Normale erhöhte Gefahr.” This shift is where the insurance can and will intervene with consequences for the businesses, and the “Gefahr” is its only real leverage in this case.

However, this threat of higher premiums is by no means made directly. Instead, the personalized version of danger speak for itself by its actions, and the confrontation with “Gefahr” is explored as far as possible:

Dieses Emporheben und Zurückschleudern des Holzes war weder vorherzusehen, noch zu verhindern, denn dies geschah schon, wenn das Holz an einzelnen Stellen verwachsen oder ästig war, wenn sich die Messer nicht schnell genug drehten oder sich selbst schlecht stellten oder wenn der Druck der Hände auf das Holz ungleichmäßig verteilt war. Ein solcher Unfall aber ging nicht vorüber, ohne dass mehrere Fingerglieder, ja selbst ganze Finger abgeschnitten wurden. (Abbildung 2.) (196)

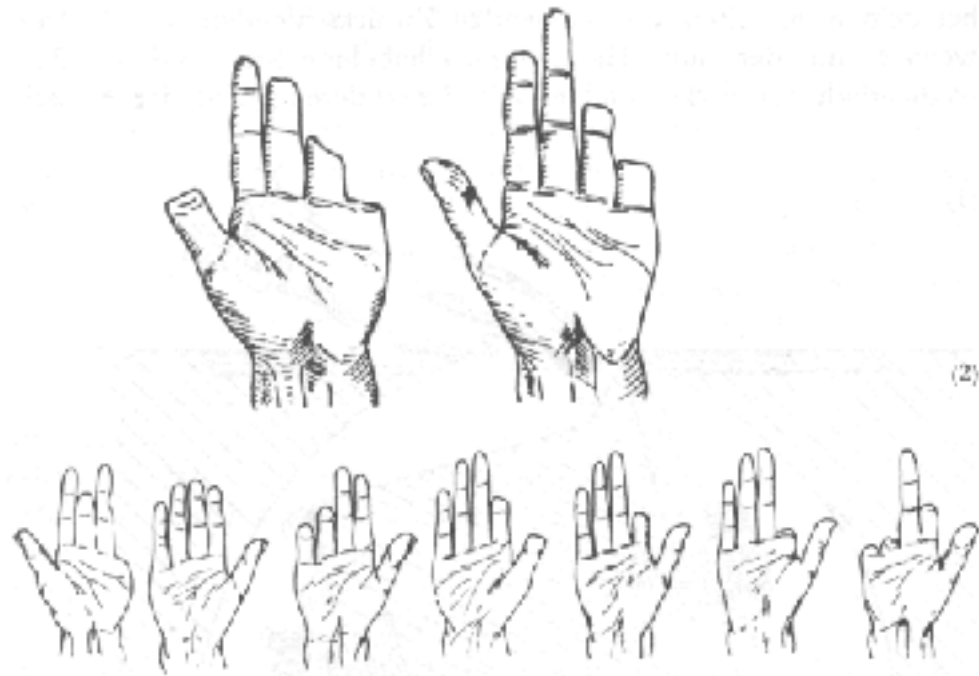


Figure 2: “Abbildung 2,” “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” (196)

It is in this context that the attention is directed to figure 2. Unlike the previous image, which could pass as a technical illustration, these two rows of mutilated hands would hardly be necessary as an illustration of how one should imagine “dass mehrere Fingerglieder, ja selbst ganze Finger abgeschnitten wurden”—no previous technological or anatomical knowledge is required to have an idea of how this may look. Yet, the hands are there, and many of them. Their purpose seems to be to force the reader to actually go through with the cringe-inducing imagination of such hands, and not just one, but nine variations of the cutting off of “mehrere Fingerglieder, ja selbst ganze Finger.” The issue is no longer abstract.

It is important here to recognize the exceptional nature of the drawings. Within such an insurance publication, they stand out for several reasons: not only through their very presence as a media innovation, but also because they are drawings of hands in a report that compares different technical devices. This is true for the hands that are depicted next to the wood-planing machines, but especially true for the hands that stand alone, illustrating injuries. Kafka's own follow-up essay, written in 1911 for the yearbook of 1910, takes up the same topic, and it is illustrated as well, but the illustrations focus on technical devices, with no rows of hands in sight.¹⁹⁶ Here, however, multiple hands stand alone, with no technological apparatus next to them, and while the text aims at a balance by acknowledging occupational risk and repeatedly justifying the very suggestion of accident prevention, the hands in the drawings emerge as monolithic, accusatory signifiers of adverse conditions, waiting for the reader to intervene. And the text goes on to address the potential for intervention:

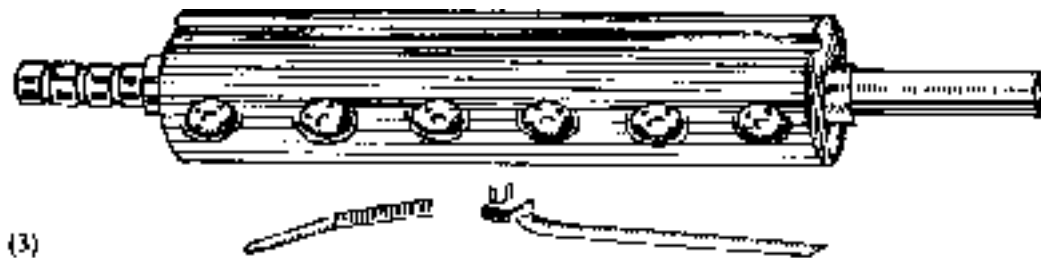
Aber nicht nur alle Vorsichtsmaßnahmen, auch alle Schutzvorrichtungen schienen dieser Gefahr gegenüber zu versagen, indem sie sich entweder als durchaus ungenügend erwiesen, oder zwar einerseits die Gefahr verminderten (im Wege selbsttätiger Zudeckung der Messerspalte durch Schutzblechschieber oder durch Verkleinerung der Messerspalte), andererseits aber die Gefahr erhöhten, indem sie den Spähnen keinen genügenden Fallraum gaben, so dass die Messerspalte sich verstopfte und häufig Verletzungen von Fingern vorkamen, wenn der Arbeiter die Spalte von Spähnen freimachen wollte. (197)

As a conciliatory gesture, current "Schutzvorrichtungen" are acknowledged, so by including the reader in a collective that may have implemented some protective measures, he is re-included in the common cause. A reader's genuine (or at least

hypothetical) attempts to protect workers “schiene dieser Gefahr gegenüber zu versagen,” and “Gefahr” is acknowledged as the common enemy, to which a solution will be presented.

The cylindrical shaft as a balance between personal and economic wellbeing

Only after this elaborate and spectacular set-up is the cylindrical shaft, the “actual” topic of the report, introduced, with the text mentioning repeatedly that the illustration can’t do justice to its advantages.



(3)

4;

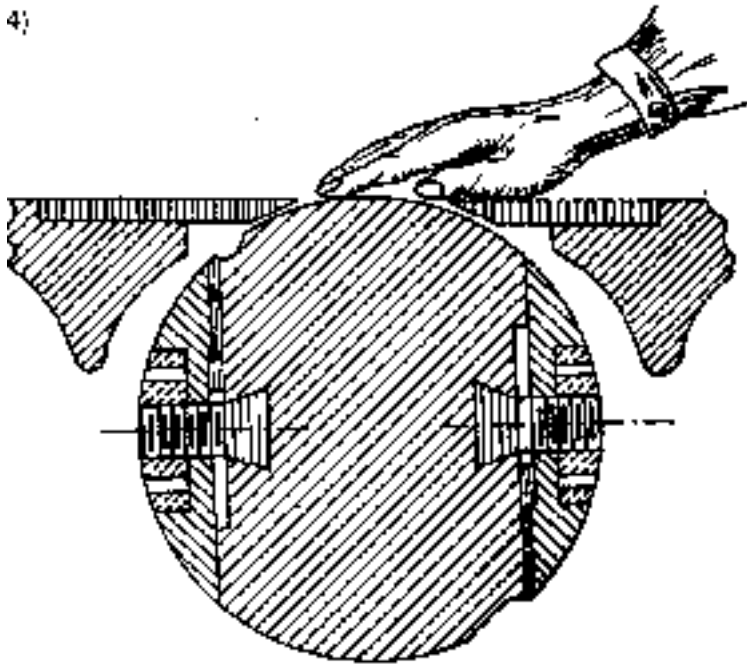


Figure 3: “Abbildung 3” and “Abbildung 4,” “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” (197)

Dadurch, dass die Welle nach Patent Schrader hinterdreht ist—auch dies kann die Abbildung nicht deutlich zeigen—und vor den Messern in sanfter Neigung sich verflacht, ist verhindert, dass die Wellen sich verschmieren und gleichzeitig bewirkt, dass das Holz sich leicht in die Welle schiebt und die Spähne genügenden Fallraum haben. (199)

The language used here stands in contrast to the one used in the description of the rectangular shaft. The threatening, naked blades that are rotating with high velocity are opposed to a shaft that gently, protectively, almost poetically adapts its shape to create a safe and ergonomic work tool (“vor den Messern in sanfter Neigung sich verflacht”). The wood is easily/lightly (“leicht”) pushed, and its residue, instead of getting stuck, has ample space to fall.

Paralleling the previous long list of how accidents are bound to happen with the less safe rectangular shaft, here the text and the illustration present the “best” worst-case-scenario that one could possibly imagine for the cylindrical shaft:

Durch die angeführten Vorrichtungen ist einerseits die überwiegende Möglichkeit beseitigt, mit den Fingern in die Spalte der Vierkantwelle zu geraten, andererseits aber ist selbst für den Fall, dass die Finger in die Spalte kommen, bewirkt, dass nur ganz unbedeutende Verletzungen sich ereignen können, Risswunden, die nicht einmal Unterbrechungen der Arbeit zur Folge haben. (Abb. 7) (199)

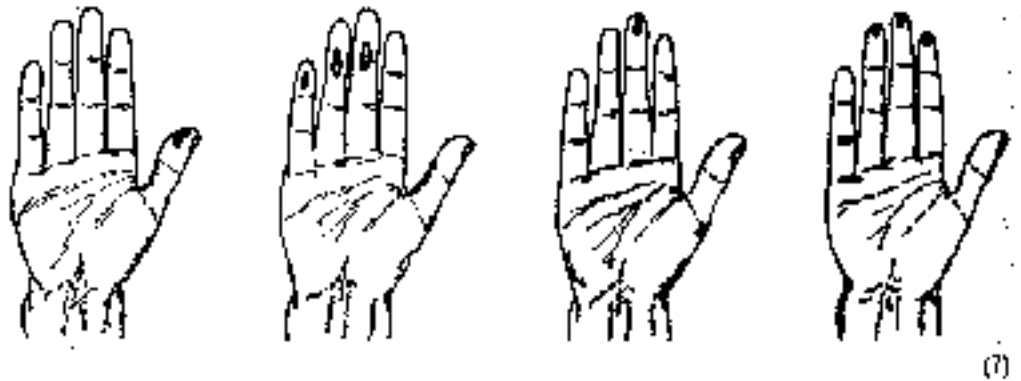


Figure 4: “Abbildung 7,” “Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen” (199)

The hands here almost exude a redemptive quality after the previous images, but they are not uninjured. Here, too, it is made clear: accident prevention does not aim at something as unrealistic and economically unsound as the complete absence of injury, but merely that the amount and extent of injuries are at a “normal” level. A series of lightly injured hands is presented in the context of increased productivity as a result of making the change to the cylindrical shaft, which even in case of an injury does not mean work would have to be interrupted, It is not avoiding the

injury, but the interruption of work that makes the case for the change, as Kafka here present the human hand as a precious commodity, and its protection in the best economic interest of the employer.

Accident insurance is presented in service of the safety of the economic organism, even more than the safety of the human body. This view exemplifies the state's intervention for the sake of its social health while safeguarding its economic health: the physical health of the worker is at the center of the text, but at the same time it is evident throughout that the goal is not accident elimination, but dealing with an acceptable level of injury. Summarizing the advantages of the new device versus the old, Kafka notes that the cylindrical shaft "verbürgt ein rasches Arbeiten. Überdies beschleunigen die runden Wellen die Arbeit auch dadurch, dass sie durch ihre vollkommene Gefährlosigkeit ein unbedenkliches Arbeiten gestatten" (201). "[U]nbedenkliches Arbeiten" is presented as an additional benefit to "rasches Arbeiten," even though preventing accidents is the explicit theme of the text. The text thus concludes by trying to find a compromise between the opposing principles of maximum efficiency and safety and seems to end in a relatively non-confrontational way.

But the lasting effect is an emphasis of the tension between these opposing principles rather than their suspension. In the text and in the drawings, the hand appears as a metonymy for the limits of what accident insurance provides. The hand drawings in particular illustrate the discrepancy between the different views, and they single out the hand as the space of the confrontation between the human body

and the machine. The illustrations not only depict an injured human body, but the fact that the hands are detached and isolated from the rest of the body and appear in multiples makes them also illustrations of the anonymous, average, statistically administered body.¹⁹⁷ The injured hand represents the limits of such a system that despite improvements through social reforms and, as here, propagating actual hand/body protecting devices, accepts accidents as normal occurrences. Hands illustrate the worker's potential sacrifice of life or, here, limb, to society and its economic health. This image of physical, bodily sacrifice in turn makes society's debt to its members visible, through the depiction of the hand as the quintessentially human limb, almost tangible and painfully identifiable, and through the emphasis on the hand as the site of the most nerves for sensory perception. While the images clearly are there for effect, the gravity of the injury is by no means exaggerated, and could have been depicted even more dramatically by showing a hand amputated at the wrist or even by referring to a deadly accident.¹⁹⁸ The hands are recognizable, and the viewer can identify with them just as much as with the intact hand. While accident insurance translates the personal tragedy of an accident into anonymous facts and figures, Kafka here translates it back into the recognizable, concrete realm of the body.¹⁹⁹ The hands include a moment of shock and a moment of empathy, and the descriptions and depictions of mutilated hands in their semiotic excess transcend the conciliatory moments.²⁰⁰ In Kafka's literary texts, the hands have a very similar function, as I have shown in my first chapter on the example of *Der Verschollene*, where the hands also stand out as markers of a tension between different views of the worker, and where a similar semiotic excess is created

through repeated references to hands.

The injured hand as origin for the literary figure depicting the clash between statistical probability and the individual body

The hands in the report can be seen as predecessors of the hand as a literary trope, such as the inhumanely twitching fingers of the telecommunicator and the almost literally reified “rissige, fast leblose” hand of the stoker in *Der Verschollene*, described in the previous chapter. The different facets of the figure of the hand that I have described in the first chapter can be further explained by Kafka’s insurance background, including this specific accident prevention text.

In both the report and in *Der Verschollene*, the hands appear as representatives of adverse conditions. In the former, the hands stand out as accusatory, and in their unresolved tension point to social ills. This can be seen as an influence for the depiction of hands in “Der Heizer,” that likewise stand out in such a function of illustrating social conditions. In the report, Kafka achieves this effect by zooming in on the hands and showing them to contain the main tension of the text, not only through pictures but also through the near personification of hands that are confronted with “Gefahr.” In *Der Verschollene*, he uses a very similar technique of zooming in on the stoker’s and other characters’ hands. The close-up creates a moment of isolation, which seemingly distracts from the direct narrative event,, but

at the same time it allows for a concentrated focus on the socio-historical context of the worker's hand. This technique of breaking down the narrative to the close-up on gestures, which Benjamin calls Kafka's "Auflösung des Geschehens ins Gestische," is present in the report as well.²⁰¹

Of course, the theme of mechanization in *Der Verschollene* can easily be linked with Kafka's insurance background, since both the report and *Der Verschollene* feature hands next to machines, where the hand is shown to be dominated by a prescribed rhythm (in the report, for example, at the pace of 3800–4000 revolutions per minute). Kafka's conclusion of the accident prevention text, which points out that the new shafts allow not only for safe working conditions but also for fast-paced work, can be linked to the omnipresent and relentless work pace in the Taylorist universe of *Der Verschollene*. The novel's "Amerika" takes methods for efficiency and speed to the extreme (but is also a critique of European production methods), illustrated by Karl's "taktmäßige Handgriffe," or the inhumanly twitching fingers of the telecommunicator and boat captain. The stoker is a machine worker as well, and his hands are "rissig"; while there is no extreme injury, their skin is broken, just as in the depiction of the mildly injured hands in the report. The stoker's hands are a sign that the boundaries of the body are continuously and physically threatened, and in their description as "almost dead," one senses not only a notion of abstract reification, but an awareness of a risk of concrete injury with a potentially fatal outcome. The economic imperative for a manic pace is also what kills Therese's mother.

In the previous chapter I have shown how Therese's story reflects problems with accident compensation, but the notion of accident prevention is tangible throughout her story as well. It is presented as a chronicle of a death foreseen, and is described as a series of preventable errors and fixable conditions (the lack of the railing, Therese's explicit depiction of the other workers' failure to intervene, and of course the physical condition of the mother that is a direct result of the work pace and the low "Handlangerinnen" status of her job).

Furthermore, the middle position of the AUVA and its employee Kafka, the act of balance between employer and employee, between capital and labor, can be seen as a source for Karl Roßmann's middle position and his inability to fully engage with the stoker or Therese. Karl is unable to understand his own obsessive hand observations, because the hand as unreadable ambivalent sign is the expression of an unresolvable tension: a tension that Kafka encountered through his insurance work, and that was contained in the new institution of accident insurance since its emergence at the end of the nineteenth century.

"Wer hat die Zauberhand"

"Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen" has been linked only sporadically to literary texts. Klaus Wagenbach points to the drawings of the wood-planing machine in the context of the execution apparatus in "In der Strafkolonie,"²⁰² and Benno Wagner associates both machines, execution apparatus

and wood-planing machine, with a third one:

A machine that both “wounds” and encodes the human body. That is the electric accounting machine (The Hollerith machine) used for processing statistical data . . . Electric data processing by the Hollerith system was based on a counting card that was first punched according to a specific set of data and then read by the needles of the accounting machine. Owing to his twofold professional responsibility for accident statistics and accident prevention, Kafka would have been alert to the two interrelated levels of bodily inscription of power in modern society: its inscription on the individual’s physical body (in the form of wounds inflicted by planing machines) and its inscription on the statistical body of social groups (in the form of data, of feeding diagrams, and curves).²⁰³

Another machine—a fictional, literary and philosophical machine—should be added to wood-planing, execution, and statistical data machines, one that connects these “two interrelated levels of bodily inscription” as well, and that features the human hand as intersection of the conflicting views of the human body. A short diary entry from 1913 shows the direct influence of the insurance hands on the hand as a literary motif. It takes up the same theme as the previously quoted letter to Max Brod that parodies the position of being the administrator of the statistical human body by depicting a series of grotesque accidents and injuries. It features the same discrepancies between theory and practice, and between abstract calculations and concrete effects, but in a different tone, in which four years of accidents and statistics may have left their traces. It is the “Maschinerie” that Kafka brings up the question about the “Zauberhand” quoted in the beginning:

Dieses Voraussagen, dieses sich nach Beispielen richten, diese bestimmte Angst ist lächerlich. Das sind Konstruktionen, die selbst in der Vorstellung in der allein sie herrschen, nur fast bis zur lebendigen Oberfläche kommen, aber immer mit einem Ruck überschwemmt werden müssen. Wer hat die

Zauberhand, daß er sie in die Maschinerie steckte und sie würde nicht durch tausend Messer zerrissen und verstreut.²⁰⁴

This short text appears in a series of philosophical self-observations. There is no direct context of accident insurance, but it is present in the form of the figure of the hand within this striking association of theoretical reflection and the concrete, corporeal hand image: The first two sentences describe the concept of predictions and “constructions,” and the third sentence links the effect of these calculations to an imagination of what can only be described as an industrial accident. The injured hand here is the figural representation of the conceptual, almost statistical reliance on data, “Beispiele,” and of the “bestimmte Angst” that could, in insurance terms, be translated as “risk.” These methods of prediction are called “ridiculous,” and in combination with the brutal image, the text shows the limits of the system described. The thousand knives seem quite hyperbolic and unrealistic, but they do also recall the knives that revolve at 3800-4000 times per minute as described in the report.

The short text is carefully set up for the moment of shock in the sudden figure of the injured or amputated hand, when the aphoristic philosophical reflection of the beginning, and the knowledge allegory of the middle sentence are transformed into a graphic description of the hand being torn apart.²⁰⁵ The hand, specifically the hand manipulating a machine, is depicted as a concrete intersection between the human body and the apparatus. But here, too, in its explicit connection to the concept of using examples for prediction, it is also the intersection between the

administrated, statistically average body and the individual person.

This diary entry shows the influence of Kafka's insurance work on the arsenal of his literary and personal tropes. Read within the personal context of self-assessment in the diary entries, as a trope for the writing subject (and the writing hand), the "Zauberhand" points to another problem, not just that of the body of the administrated subject, but also that of the administrating one; it may well be the latter's hand that gets caught in the machine of predictions and abstractions. The physical risk to the body and the injuries to the subject are linked to the position of the administrator as well and therefore also describe Kafka's own occupational risk.

The question of who has the magical hand that resist the threats posed by the modern view on the subject, is, of course, a rhetorical one, a question that ostentatiously omits the question mark. There is no answer, at least no positive one. Certainly, it is not the insurance-ghostwriter Kafka who has this magic hand; rather, he himself tries to use ghostwriting hands whenever he can. In a letter to Felice from 1912, Kafka writes about his work at the office:

So selbstständig wie Du wohl arbeitest könnte ich gar nicht arbeiten, Verantwortungen weiche ich aus wie eine Schlange, ich habe vielerlei zu unterschreiben, ich unterschreibe auch alles (trotzdem es eigentlich nicht sein darf) nur mit FK als könne mich das entlasten, deshalb fühle ich mich auch in allen Bureausachen so zur Schreibmaschine hingezogen, weil ihre Arbeit, gar durch die Hand des Schreibmaschinisten ausgeführt so anonym ist.²⁰⁶

But the anonymity through the initials or the typist's hand is, admittedly, a self-delusion: there is no magic hand that is unaffected by the threats to the subject,

and the observing, administrating, signing, and writing hands are included.

The constant preoccupation with risk and statistics weights on the administrator of the injured body. The threat is not only one of physical injury, but of the responsibility of being involved in the system that views the modern subject from an abstract and anonymous vantage point. In the next chapter, I will pursue the issue of responsibility and of viewing the individual from an abstract anonymous perspective by showing that this perspective also affects the white collar employee and bureaucrat Josef K. in *Der Proceß*.

The physically threatened hand—not only of the worker who provides manual labor but also of a struggling administrator—is found throughout Kafka’s work. The literary trope as it appears in *Der Verschollene* becomes more abstract in its development, but there are also continuities, consisting in the tension between conflicting views on the subject that Kafka encountered in his insurance work. This tension will become exponentially more extreme during World War I, when Kafka’s tasks at the AUVA will be focused on war-specific issues and when work safety issues such as risk assessment and especially accident prevention will be eclipsed by a new and unprecedented level of violence and injury. In the fourth chapter I present a reading of a short text from 1917 where the threatened hand is the hand of the observer, administrator, and writer in the context of the war and where inner and outer, subjective and objective tensions intensify and converge.

Chapter 3

“Mit zwanzig Händen in die Welt hineinfahren”: The commerce of legal, economic, and writing hands in *Der Proceß*

“Ich wollte immer mit zwanzig Händen in die Welt hineinfahren.”²⁰⁷ In Josef K.’s final contemplation about his current and past behavior at the end of his year-long trial, the number of hands seems excessive even for hypothetical hands. But compared with K.’s mostly manual attempts to gain control over his trial, and the use of gesticulating, touching, writing, fighting, literal, and figurative hands throughout the text, the number seems almost modest. In this chapter, I will show that in *Der Proceß*, Kafka further develops his hand imagery to denote the white-collar employee Josef K.’s struggle with the kind of abstract, anonymous but all-encompassing legal and economic system that I have described in my previous chapter. As we shall see, the novel also identifies the hand as Kafka’s quintessential trope for authorship.

Throughout *Der Proceß*, hand imagery depicts a system of confusion and interchangeability. Tactile transgressions of the court and its members threaten K.’s physical and social integrity. In turn, K. uses hands and tactile transgressions to get a “hold” on the invisible court. This includes the recruitment of potential helpers, because in the all-encompassing court system, every person plays a role in the big organization. But his attempts to influence his trial fail. Instead, the hand

interactions illustrate the individual's "fungibility"—a legal and economic concept defined by the fact that for something a perfect or acceptable replacement is available. “Fungible” is in this way an antonym of unique. A classic example of what is fungible would be money (whose very purpose as a universal equivalent is to be fungible) and commodities, such as oil, whereas, say, a painting by Rembrandt is not. People in a social context are (typically) not fungible, but in an economic context, people can be fungible—for example as workers, and employees, and *Der Proceß* takes the fungibility of the individual to the extreme by extending it to the most intimate and private interactions.

This depersonalization and de-individualization are further illustrated by hands appearing as outright substitutes in the description of certain individuals. The economic and legal spheres are also inseparable at K.'s workplace at the bank; when K. is at work at his desk, he cannot distinguish between the trial, his bank work, and private life. K.'s desk functions as a fusion of the public and private spheres, and the hands on the desk become inextricably interwoven with the act of writing. This connects with Kafka's own self-fashioning as a writer, which relies on a poetics of controlling and controlled hands. By creating a fusion between his most personal trope and his prime trope of social critique, he presents the act of writing as inherently political. Self-referencing writing hands is thus not an act of aesthetic solipsism for Kafka, but is on the contrary an acknowledgment that as a writer he is as much a part of an inescapable social universe as his protagonist.

Previous interpretations of *Der Proceß* have not taken these contexts into

account together. The importance of gesture in general in Kafka's writing was established early on by Walter Benjamin's important and influential Kafka readings.²⁰⁸ And while, since then, gesture has received more attention in *Der Proceß* than most of Kafka's other texts, the research differs strongly from my focus in this chapter, though of course certain aspects are relevant for my reading. Most research that reads gesture in *Der Proceß* focuses on the meaning and readability of signs solely within the confines of the text (or, more rarely, with very different contexts compared to my approach, for example Hartmut Binder who connects K.'s gestures to Kafka's real-life relationships, or Martin Puchner who addresses the influence of the contemporary theater on K.'s gestures).²⁰⁹ Few research looks at the trope of hands as such, which includes the dimension of tactility and the interplay with literal and figurative language of hands and hand related idioms.²¹⁰ And insofar as scholars have written about hands, only individual aspects of the hands are treated, whereas I show that it is precisely the fact that hands connect various spheres that turns the hands into such a powerful and all-encompassing trope.

1. Hands as incomprehensible and interchangeable signs of an abstract and anonymous court system

Hands illustrate the abstract court in their function as signs and as instruments of gesture, but also as organs of tactility and, linguistically, in an interplay between figurative and literal hands and hand-related idioms. In this section, I lay out how

K.'s identity is threatened and he is under attack as an individual and as an object of legal power. His disorientation is illustrated by hand signs that are presented as arbitrary and interchangeable. This extends to a semantic interchangeability between literal and figurative meanings that are at times almost presented as substitutes for one another. Hands are organs of a literal "Verhandlung"; they grab and seize K., who in turn attempts with his own hands to grasp the abstract law and court.

K.'s threatened identity and individuality

In many ways, *Der Proceß* can be seen as an exemplification of the worldview of the modern insurance state, which conceives of the subject in an abstract, anonymous manner that clashes with the subject as an individual. In my first two chapters, I have shown that the individuality of the subject is threatened using the example of the blue-collar worker, and that there is a tension between conflicting views of the subject. I have demonstrated how in *Der Verschollene*, this abstract and anonymous system leads to a view of the blue-collar worker as de-individualized, objectified, and interchangeable. Similar to *Der Verschollene*, hand movements in *Der Proceß* illustrate how the individual is affected personally and physically by an increasing anonymity. But while in *Der Verschollene* this is primarily linked to physical work, here it is linked to the very principle of economic interchangeability that the white-collar employee K. represents himself, since as a bank employee K. is involved in the process of generating fungibility, with money as a universal equivalent. In

Philosophie des Geldes, Georg Simmel writes for instance:

Die Tatsache, daß immer mehr Dinge für Geld zu haben sind, sowie die damit solidarische, daß es zum zentralen und absoluten Wert auswächst, hat zur Folge, daß die Dinge schließlich nur noch so weit gelten, wie sie Geld kosten, und daß die Wertqualität, mit der wir sie empfinden, nur als eine Funktion des Mehr oder Weniger ihres Geldpreises erscheint.²¹¹

As I will show in my second section, the abstraction of money and economic fungibility go along with the abstraction of statistics, risk management, and the court. Accepting and believing in money as such a universal equivalent also shows its inherent link to the state and its institutions:

Das Gefühl der persönlichen Sicherheit, das der Geldbesitz gewährt, ist vielleicht die konzentrierteste und zugespitzteste Form und Äußerung des Vertrauens auf die staatlich-gesellschaftliche Organisation und Ordnung.²¹²

Using the example of Kafka's accident prevention text, my second chapter has described the discrepancies and absurdity that occur in a system with a statistical, impersonal view of the individual subject, looking primarily at the example of the worker who performs manual labor, while also, in both the accident prevention text as well as the "Zauberhand" diary passage, demonstrating that the involvement in the administration of the human body also affects the white-collar worker. In *Der Proceß*, K. is involved in this sphere of abstraction and economic fungibility through his work, while at the same time being deeply affected by his treatment as de-individualized by the omnipotent court system, by the same mechanisms that also affect the blue collar worker.

As Wolf Kittler has convincingly shown, there are many parallels between K.'s trial and Austrian criminal law.²¹³ But K. himself also explicitly states that the court is not just the "normal" court: "Vor allem . . . handelt es sich gar nicht um einen Proceß vor dem gewöhnlichen Gericht" (124). Rather, K. is part of a society where his role is determined by an all-encompassing law and court that can be linked to the depersonalizing, homogenizing effects of the worldview of the subject in the modern insurance state. This connection is made most explicitly by Steel Burrow: "Membership in the court is similar to membership in the type of insurance mutuality that Kafka created insofar as both are abstract rather than qualitative mutualities."²¹⁴

Similar to blue-collar workers like the stoker, K.'s identity is threatened as well, and he too is interchangeable. Not only does he worry about his position at the bank, when he envies Titorelli's job security;²¹⁵ even the bank itself is replaceable, when K. is reminded about the fact that an important client, the "Fabrikant," can easily change the bank he patronizes.²¹⁶ The text depicts K.'s personal struggle, yet K. remains an impersonal protagonist throughout, and has been described as an everyman (also expressed through the impersonal abbreviation "K." that stands in for a name rather than being a name).²¹⁷ But rather than the Christian, allegorical signification of "Jedermann," Kafka's use of K. as everyman points in the direction of the insurance subject, the (statistically) "average man."

It is especially his trial experience that shows K.'s lack of individuality. He never learns any reason for his arrest, there is no individual case at all, and

whenever he speaks about his trial, he is given answers and descriptions of court proceedings in the most general terms, devoid of any connection to his individual case. Never is there an even remotely personalized explanation or verdict. While his personal, physical boundaries are violated, the case remains impersonal and general, abstract and anonymous. Throughout, there exists a discrepancy between the individual experience and the depersonalized nature of his trial, as seen in his inability to make himself heard in regard to the court and have an influence on his trial. K.'s story is dominated by what he is reduced to by the court; the reader meets him at the moment of his arrest, and follows him until the resolution of the trial, and every action that is described relates to his trial.

The tension between individuality and collectivity is reflected throughout the text: In the cathedral chapter, K. finds himself alone in the cathedral and asks himself: "Aber konnte denn wirklich gepredigt werden? Konnte K. allein die Gemeinde darstellen?" (285) K.'s friend Hasterer addresses his colleagues strictly by rank, not taking into account individual personalities at all: "Darum richtete er auch an die jungen Herren unten am Tisch, die noch fast gar keinen Rang besaßen, immer nur allgemeine Ansprachen, als wären es nicht einzelne, sondern bloß ein zusammengeballter Klumpen" (331-332). At the end, as K. is kneeling in the quarry, about to be executed, he sees from afar a figure that remains abstract and anonymous, stretching out his or her arms in a remote house window and he ponders the enigmatic figure's identity: "War es ein einzelner? Waren es alle?" (312). When, moments later, he raises his hands in a similar gesture, he is explicit about the abstract and anonymous nature of the court by stating that he hasn't seen

any significant member or entity of the court: “Wo war der Richter den er nie gesehen hatte? Wo war das hohe Gericht bis zu dem er nie gekommen war? Er hob die Hände und spreizte alle Finger” (312).

Hand signs

Hands represent the anonymous abstract conditions, the effects on K. as well as the attempts to overcome them. Hand signs are presented as devoid of meaning, and the random and interchangeable nature of signs serves to depict the fungibility of the individual in a depersonalizing and depersonalized world ruled by an omnipresent and omnipotent legal system. Unlike the narrator in *Der Verschollene*, the narrator of *Der Proceß* realizes fully that the value of hands as signs is limited as best. Hands are presented as interchangeable signs with fluctuating or absent meaning throughout the text. Similar to *Der Verschollene*, tautological phrasings where movements that already imply being carried out by hands are still specified to be carried out “mit der Hand”²¹⁸ are found throughout the text. But much more explicitly than in *Der Verschollene*, hand signs are perceived and presented as superfluous by the narrator: “Der Onkel in seiner Aufregung zeigte ihm mit der Hand, daß K. ihn habe rufen lassen, woran auch sonst kein Zweifel gewesen wäre” (123). Not only is the novel full of explicit hand descriptions that are unnecessary, but at times, the hands appear as outright distractions. “Der Aufseher stimmte ihm möglicherweise zu, wie K. mit einem Seitenblick zu erkennen glaubte. Aber es war ebensogut möglich daß er gar nicht zugehört hatte, denn er hatte eine Hand fest auf den Tisch gedrückt und

schien die Finger ihrer Länge nach zu vergleichen“ (24).

The novel thus presents hands as part of an inherently unreadable semiotic system in which signs are interchangeable and devoid of individual meaning.²¹⁹ The negation of meaning begins with Josef K.'s arrest. The warder Franz does not bother to explain the arrest and merely states: “Es ist so, glauben Sie es doch,” sagte Franz, führte die Kaffeetasse die er in der Hand hielt nicht zum Mund sondern sah K. mit einem langen wahrscheinlich bedeutungsvollen, aber unverständlichen Blicke an“ (13). When one of the warders questions whether it makes sense for K. to call a lawyer, K. responds, fully aware that everybody seems to operate outside of the category of sense: “Sie wollen einen Sinn und führen das Sinnloseste auf was es gibt?“ (23). Hand signs exemplify this pattern of lack of clear logic and causality throughout the text. Compared to *Der Verschollene*, *Der Proceß* thus features a different sign system. While *Der Verschollene* also plays with the meaning of signs and gesture, and different levels of consciousness of the impossibility to read signs, *Der Proceß* treats the signs as random and interchangeable from the outset, a feature of the novelistic world that K. recognizes very quickly.²²⁰

Walter Benjamin famously pointed to a development in Kafka's work away from the meaning of gesture. Describing Kafka's technique of “Auflösung des Geschehens in das Gestische,” he states that “Kafkas ganzes Werk einen Kodex von Gesten darstellt, die keineswegs von Hause aus für den Verfasser eine sichere symbolische Bedeutung haben Je weiter Kafkas Meisterschaft gedieh, desto öfter verzichtete er darauf, diese Gebärden üblichen Situationen anzupassen, sie zu

erklären“.²²¹ Unlike in *Der Verschollene*, the causality of hand signs is not emphasized. “Solche Begründungen hat schon der ‘Prozeß’ weit hinter sich gelassen.”²²² It does not surprise that Benjamin chooses as an example of such an incomprehensible gesture a hand description from *Der Prozeß*, a movement of the priest in the cathedral chapter:²²³ “Bei den ersten Bänken machte er halt, aber dem Geistlichen schien die Entfernung noch zu groß, er streckte die Hand aus und zeigte mit dem scharf gesenkten Zeigefinger auf eine Stelle knapp vor der Kanzel” (287). The text itself spells out this moment of randomness even more explicitly in another cathedral passage: “‘Du bist Josef K.’, sagte der Geistliche und erhob eine Hand auf der Brüstung in einer unbestimmten Bewegung” (288).

A continuous example of the lack of meaning of hand signs is that of hands knocking. From K.’s first hand movement (“er läutete,” [7]), which is immediately answered by a knocking on the door, ringing and especially knocking hands appear throughout the novel. The first instance of knocking already demonstrates a discrepancy between the polite, thoughtful act of not intruding coupled with the unexplained and intrusive arrest in K.’s bedroom. While the first example still follows certain social conventions, the next instance of “klopfen” no longer does, when the warder Willem repeatedly pats K.’s shoulder (“klopfte ihm öfters auf die Schulter,” [10]). K. quickly understands that knocking does not require a reaction when he is irritated by his landlady Frau Grubach: “Dann schlug er die Tür zu, ein leises Klopfen beachtete er nicht mehr” (37). K. himself is the author of misunderstood and mismatched hand usage when he touches one of the warders in a later passage in a supply room of his office and wants to calm the warder: “Aber er

wollte ihm nicht Schmerz bereiten, hatte ihn auch nur ganz leicht angegriffen, trotzdem aber schrie der Mann auf, als habe K. ihn nicht mit zwei Fingern, sondern mit einer glühenden Zange erfaßt“ (95).

K. rarely tries to understand gestures, and in the rare instances where he does, it proves futile and is explicitly explained as superfluous. When K. struggles to understand an Italian colleague to whom he is supposed to show the city, he first encounters the problems of communicating in a foreign language, and then the inability to read the Italian's hands:

K. begann viele Unannehmlichkeiten vorauszusehn, vorläufig gab er es auf, den Italiener verstehen zu wollen – in der Gegenwart des Direktors, der ihn so leicht verstand, wäre es unnötige Anstrengung gewesen – und er beschränkte sich darauf, ihn verdrießlich zu beobachten, wie er tief und doch leicht in dem Fauteuil ruhte, wie er öfters an seinem kurzen, scharf geschnittenen Röckchen zupfte und wie er einmal mit erhobenen Armen und lose in den Gelenken bewegten Händen irgendetwas darzustellen versuchte das K. nicht begreifen konnte, trotzdem er vorgebeugt die Hände nicht aus den Augen ließ. (275)

Subsequently, he is told explicitly by his superior to not worry about understanding him:

Wenn er den Italiener nicht gleich im Anfang verstehe, so müsse er sich dadurch nicht verblüffen lassen, das Verständnis komme sehr rasch und wenn er auch viel überhaupt nicht verstehen sollte, so sei es auch nicht so schlimm, denn für den Italiener sei es nicht gar so wichtig verstanden zu werden. (277-278)

Gestures and hand signs are omnipresent, but there seems to be a universal

agreement that it is not primarily their meaning that makes them important. Rather, they demonstrate a separation between sign and meaning, and there is no longer an automatic association.

Throughout the text, and from the beginning, K. maintains a certain independence of any expectation of content or meaning, cause and effect of hand signs: “obwohl sein Handschlag nicht angenommen worden war, fühlte er sich . . . immer unabhängiger von allen diesen Leuten“ (25-26). Appearing in court, he happily (“lächelnd”) acknowledges his inability to understand secret signs:

Eben gibt hier neben mir der Herr Untersuchungsrichter jemandem von Ihnen ein geheimes Zeichen. Es sind also Leute unter Ihnen, die von hier oben dirigiert werden. Ich weiß nicht, ob das Zeichen jetzt Zischen oder Beifall bewirken sollte und verzichte dadurch, daß ich die Sache vorzeitig verrate, ganz bewußt darauf, die Bedeutung des Zeichens zu erfahren. Es ist mir vollständig gleichgültig[. . .]. (67)

Hand signs are presented as unintelligible, arbitrary, and largely interchangeable to K. and the reader (and, according to Benjamin, even the author himself).²²⁴

Therefore, the text itself leads away from the question of meaning of individual gestures. Rather, it presents a principle of randomness and an interchangeability of meaning; Philip Grundlehner describes gestures as “substructure of language occasionally as polysemous as the story itself.”²²⁵ There is an inflationary use of hands and hand signs, and such a multiplicity and ubiquity of hand signs also appear in K.’s assessment about his own hypothetical twenty hands.²²⁶

Literal and figurative hands as part of the semantic interchangeability

This principle of interchangeability includes a play with literal and figurative levels of language regarding hands and hand-related idioms that consists in dissolving conventional contexts. For example, initially K. is determined “nicht den geringsten Vorteil, den er vielleicht gegenüber diesen Leuten besaß, aus der Hand zu geben” (12). This idiomatic expression is taken literally throughout the text, for example when his superior (or rather, a superior’s representative, the “Direktor-Stellvertreter,” further increasing the moment of inaccessability and interchangeability) takes objects out of his hands,²²⁷ objects that K. needs for working and writing. And where the idiom is used primarily in its figurative sense, there are nevertheless physical, literal effects, for instance when K. decides “seine Verteidigung selbst in die Hand zu nehmen” (176)²²⁸— this decision proves “schwerwiegender” (176), since he no longer can put this burden onto his lawyer, also described in physical terms (“Solange er die Verteidigung auf den Advokaten überwältzt hatte,” 176). As he is pondering his decision to take matters into his own hands, he holds onto a doorknob (“hielt sich mit einer Hand an der Klinke fest,” 167). Through this layering, literal and figurative, concrete and abstract dimensions are presented as interchangeable, emphasizing that K. is increasingly affected physically by the burden of the trial.

The interchangeability between literal and figurative levels is also found in related terms, such as “erfassen” and “greifen.” Physical, literal grasping is associated and juxtaposed with the figurative dimension, for example when K. is

startled by the knocking of another tenant when visiting his flatmate Fräulein Bürstner: “Kaum hatte er sich *gefaßt* sprang er zu Fräulein Bürstner und *nahm ihre Hand*”²²⁹ (45). The cognitive act of grasping is layered with the literal act of grasping, further creating ambiguity with the substitution of literal and figurative levels of language for one another. When the deputy director leads away one of K.’s clients, “*griff* er gar nicht ein, *stützte* sich ein wenig vorgebeugt *mit beiden Händen* auf den Schreibtisch [...] und sah zu, wie die zwei Herren unter weiteren Reden die Papiere vom Tisch nahmen und im Direktionszimmer verschwanden” (175). The lack of his own intervention (“eingreifen”) appears as interchangeable with the inactivity of his hands on the desk that do not engage in any literal instance of “eingreifen.” Similarly, the hand movements in court are interpreted (“aufgefaßt”) independently from any “actual” meaning: “Es konnte nur ein Zeichen tiefer Demütigung sein oder es mußte zumindest so *aufgefaßt* werden, daß der Untersuchungsrichter nach dem Heftchen, wie es auf den Tisch gefallen war, *griff*” (63-64). The confounding of the abstract and concrete use of hands and hand-idioms illustrates the confounding views of the subject in its concrete and abstract views, as a concrete, individual being and as a more general, abstract, statistical entity, just as K.’s case remains abstract and anonymous without him ever finding out anything concrete relating to his individual situation. In this sense, Kafka’s “principle of literality”, which is perhaps most prominently featured through his hand imagery, presents a struggle between different levels of language that reflects K.’s struggle for agency and autonomy in regard to the abstract court system.²³⁰

Hands as organs of “Verhandlung” and being grasped by the law organism

The interchangeability of literal and figurative language is essential in the depiction of the trial, or “Gerichtsverhandlung,” (241) and this includes playing with the etymologies of “handeln” and “verhandeln”. When K. collapses in the courthouse, he realizes “daß die zwei über ihn wie über eine Sache verhandelten . . . Aber plötzlich fühlte er die Hand des Auskunftgebers an einem Arm und die Hand des Mädchens am andern. ‘Also auf, Sie schwacher Mann,’ sagte der Auskunftgeber” (104). The court officers are literally above (“über”) him, and pull him up with their hands.²³¹ The image is the literalization of negotiating over someone (“über jemanden verhandeln”), directly linking the abstract law with the body and hands of the characters, organisms, and organizations, and showing the physical effect of the entanglement of the individual into the court organism. The incident also emphasizes the moment of deindividualization and objectification, further reinforced by explicitly likening his own person to “eine Sache,” an object, indicating how the body of the white-collar employee, too, is affected by being a part of a legal system that threatens the identity of the subject.

Right in the beginning, a direct link between the hands and legal negotiation (“Verhandlung”) is established, when the nightstand in Fräulein Bürstners room is moved in the middle of the room, “als Verhandlungstisch”:

Sie sind durch die Vorgänge des heutigen Morgens wohl sehr überrascht?” fragte der Aufseher und verschob dabei mit beiden Händen die paar Gegenstände die auf dem Nachttischchen lagen, die Kerze mit Zündhölzchen, ein Buch und ein Nadelkissen, als seien es Gegenstände, die er zur Verhandlung benötige. (20)

K. tries to conclude the scene by shaking the warder's hand ("der Sache durch einen gegenseitigen Händedruck einen versöhnlichen Abschluß zu geben" [25]), but instead of taking his hand, the warder puts on his hat, again "mit beiden Händen," causing K.'s own attempt at hand-negotiation, or "Verhandlung," to fail. A connection between a legal negotiation and a manual intervention can also be seen in the reflections of K.'s lawyer Huld about the practice of "Vorverhandlungen": if they go well, "dann sei das Ganze, wie die Chirurgen sagen, eine reine Wunde und man könne getrost das Folgende erwarten" (164). In this image, K. is at the mercy of the hands of a surgeon, with the term "Chirurg" through the German meaning of "Handwerker" connecting the physical concrete level (including bodily effects on K.) and the abstract dimensions of the law by substituting them for one another.

The detailed description of literal manipulations is not only important for the depiction of K. and the court personnel, but also of the court itself, which is referred to as a "Gerichtswesen" (225) and "Gerichtsorganismus" (160).²³² Hands appear as virtual organs of the court, and K.'s contact with the court throughout has the dimension of physical contact. He is arrested, grasped, seized, dragged, and executed by two pairs of hands. It is a hand that points him into the courtroom,²³³ and a hand that drags him there.²³⁴ And while his initial fear of being "grabbed" ("vielleicht würden sie ihn doch packen," 16) is figurative and abstract, this is exactly what occurs during a court appearance: "man hinderte ihn, alte Männer hielten den Arm vor und *irgendeine Hand* – er hatte nicht Zeit sich umzudrehn – faßte ihn hinten am

Kragen" (70). This hand is "irgendeine" hand, a random hand, devoid of any identifying marker and as such the ideal representative of the depersonalizing, homogenizing, abstract, and anonymous law.

Finally, K. is grabbed by his executioners: "Sie hielten die Schultern eng hinter den seinen, knickten die Arme nicht ein, sondern benützten sie, um K.'s Arme in ihrer ganzen Länge zu umschlingen, unten erfaßten sie K.'s Hände mit einem schulmäßigen, eingeübten, unwiderstehlichen Griff" (306). Stefan Andriopoulos describes with the example of this "Griff" how *Der Proceß* takes literally "die figurale Ebene der wissenschaftlichen Darstellungen überindividueller Körperschaften . . . nach denen die zu einer überindividuellen Körperschaft verbundenen Individuen miteinander verschmelzen."²³⁵ In this sense, hands carry out the "Gerichtsverhandlung" literally, and they are representatives of the abstract and anonymous mechanism of the law.

By seeing K. as part, and victim, of a larger organism, or corporation, we can understand how the tension between the subject as an individual and as part of a larger entity becomes apparent, exemplifying how the white collar employee K. is affected, both legally and physically. The pairing of the executioners further emphasizes an impersonal view of the subject, which is taken even further by rendering both the executioners and K. indistinguishable from one another, manifesting a dissolution of physical boundaries by fusing them together: "K. gieng straff gestreckt zwischen ihnen, sie bildeten jetzt alle drei eine solche Einheit, daß wenn man einen von ihnen zerschlagen hätte, alle zerschlagen gewesen wären. Es

war eine Einheit, wie sie fast nur Lebloses bilden kann" (306). The emphasis on the dehumanizing aspect, and the phrasing "wie sie fast nur Lebloses bilden kann" recall the almost lifeless, objectified hand of the stoker in *Der Verschollene*.

K.'s attempts to grasp the law

Despite the complete "grip" that the court has on him, K. himself can never grasp the nature of the court or establish any meaningful contact. Unable to understand the nature of the law, trying to literally and concretely get a hold of the court, remains an attempt of K. throughout. He wants to regain control and agency by substituting prehension²³⁶, the haptic act of grasping and seizing, for comprehension and cognition.

The description of the executioners and K. as one unit is described almost in terms of wish fulfillment, and this wish stems from K.'s repeated but failed attempts to establish contact with the court. Here, the tension between the individual and the collective is at least temporarily suspended, and it is the only time that K. manages to make a connection to the court, or to anyone: "Gleich aber vor dem Tor hängten sie sich in ihn in einer Weise ein, wie K. noch niemals mit einem Menschen gegangen war" (306). This passage is followed by the description quoted above of the arms being interlaced in their full length and the hands as interlaced as well.²³⁷ It seems almost like a temporary fulfillment of K.'s fantasy to immerse himself into the world with twenty hands (something he fails at throughout the text when trying to

establish contact with others, as I will show in the second section of this chapter).

K.'s impulse to use his hands for understanding his situation and defending himself is a reaction to the ubiquity of the court in his life and a lack of any boundaries between the realms of private and public. The sphere of the law completely governs the individual, and the court is omnipresent, with seemingly total surveillance. K. already realizes this at his arrest when he tries not to accept the "Beaufsichtigungsrecht" (8) of the warders. When he feels the grip of "irgendeine Hand," his reaction is not to anyone, or anything, touching him, but his sensation is described in the most general and abstract terms as a lack of freedom: "ihm war, als werde seine Freiheit eingeschränkt" (70-71).

Yet, while the omnipresent and omnipotent court has seemingly complete supervision over him, it remains immaterial and invisible to K. until the very end, when he asks his desperate last questions about the whereabouts of the judge, "den er nie gesehen hatte" and the court "zu dem er nie gekommen war" (312). Nevertheless, up to this moment, K. tries to use his hands and their capacity for tactile perception to make the invisible, abstract law concrete and manifest and to gain access to an incomprehensible sphere. He literally hopes to grasp the invisible court, and in an optimistic moment, it seems to him "als könne diese ganz unübersichtlich große Organisation an irgend einer allerdings verborgenen im Dunkel erst zu ertastenden Handhabe leicht gefaßt, ausgerissen und zerschlagen werden" (339). He wants to touch the large, incomprehensible, invisible organization, and the tactile dimension is emphasized not only through the fact that

it needs to be grasped (“gefaßt”), but through the fact that the “Handhabe” needs to be carefully felt (“zu ertastenden”). The lack of visual perception in the description of the “dark” and “hidden” reinforces the desperate focus on the tactile, since whatever K. needs to find seems invisible but tangible.

When K. feels hopeless about his situation, his hand initiates tactile connections “almost unconsciously”: “Wieder gieng sein Denken in Klagen aus. Fast unwillkürlich, nur um dem ein Ende zu machen, tastete er mit dem Finger nach dem Knopf der elektrischen Glocke, die ins Vorzimmer führte” (171). In turn, when he lacks access to anything palpable, he becomes “haltlos,” “das einzig Faßbare” being hidden by his interlocutor’s hand:

jedenfalls bedeckte der Fabrikant die Papiere mit der Hand und begann von neuem, ganz nahe an K. heranrückend, eine allgemeine Darstellung des Geschäftes. “Es ist schwierig”, sagte K., rümpfte die Lippen und sank, da die Papiere, das einzig Faßbare, verdeckt waren, haltlos gegen die Seitenlehne. (173)

In the cathedral chapter, there are several instances of the tactile as means to compensate for the lack of visual clarity, and intellectual understanding of the circumstances. The cathedral is a site where K. works hard to make sense of the court dealings with the help of the chaplain, and it is introduced by images of angelic hands, as well as K.’s own hands:

Die Außenwand der Brüstung und ihr Übergang zur tragenden Säule war von grünem Laubwerk gebildet in das kleine Engel griffen, bald lebhaft bald ruhend. K. trat vor die Kanzel und untersuchte sie von allen Seiten, die Bearbeitung des Steines war überaus sorgfältig, das tiefe Dunkel zwischen dem Laubwerk und hinter ihm schien wie eingefangen und festgehalten, K.

legte seine Hand in eine solche Lücke und tastete dann den Stein vorsichtig ab. (282)

K. tries to understand “das tiefe Dunkel” by tactile examination and establishing contact between the hands of the angels and his own hands. In the cathedral, the lack of light causes disorientation, challenging his sense of touch, (“Langsam setzte sich also K. in Gang, tastete sich auf den Fußspitzen an der Bank hin,” 286) and when exiting the cathedral, K is worried about finding his way out of the dark :

"Nun", sagte der Geistliche und reichte K. die Hand, "dann geh." "Ich kann mich aber im Dunkel allein nicht zurechtfinden", sagte K. "Geh links zur Wand", sagte der Geistliche, "dann weiter die Wand entlang ohne sie zu verlassen und Du wirst einen Ausgang finden." (304)

But no matter how much K. tries to get a hold of the law, it remains invisible, and instead of being able to grasp the law, he finds that the law incapacitates his own hands when he tries to grasp court members at his first court appearance: “die langen Bärte waren steif und schütter und griff man in sie, so war es als bilde man bloß Krallen, nicht als griffe man in Bärte” (71). In the very moment of contact, the hands’ ability to establish any connection is challenged, and the moment of grasping turns into a moment of immobilization and petrification. The lifelessness of the material is also triggered by touching the beards, themselves a “dead,” numb extension of the living body, like the nails, or “Krallen,” unable to experience sensation. The hand becomes devoid both of its active moment of agency, and of its more passive ability to feel. Contact and communication, even sense perception, cannot function, at a moment when K. is most desperately trying to grasp his

situation. Even K.'s human identity is threatened by the hands' being likened to animal claws, with an emphasis on the inanimate, numb part—the stiff, nail-like substance implied by “Krallen”—anticipating his own execution “wie ein Hund” (312). A similar moment occurs in the above mentioned passage in which the hands are compared to red hot pliers, where again there is no control over the hands, in an image of a non-human, inanimate object replacing the hand, showing again that it is not only the blue collar worker's hands that are estranged and under attack, but the bank employee K.'s as well.

The failure of K.'s act of touch shows deep disturbances in subject-object relations, because tactility represents in itself a subject-object negotiation.²³⁸ Both the physical transgressions by the court as well as K.'s inability to establish contact indicate the attack on the boundaries of the individual. But these attempts at comprehension are not compensating for a lack of visual clarity; on the contrary, tactile disturbances illustrate the same crisis that causes the visual disturbances.²³⁹ The twenty hands with which K. tries desperately to “penetrate the world” can be seen in this context as well, both regarding K.'s role in his trial, but also including all kinds of interpersonal contact: work relationships, friendships, family relations, and erotic relationships, as I will show in the following section.

2. Hands as instruments of economic, erotic, and social exchange

In an attempt to compensate for not being able to grasp the court proceedings, K. tries to gain control by establishing contact and communication with individuals that he believes can help him, through various instances of grasping and even groping the people he encounters, especially women. But like his attempts to get a hold of his trial, this never leads to any success. Rather, the frequent exchange of hands and the tactile encounters illustrate that people are as interchangeable as hand signs and hand language. Every person becomes a means to an end, and he exchanges them with one another frequently. Everyone is a potential affiliate of the court because the court is omnipresent and links the realms of the private and the public. Throughout, not only are gestures and hand signs presented as interchangeable, but individuals also become a currency and are thus fungible.

This interchangeability of individuals is further emphasized by the fact that there are no boundaries between the realms of the private, work, and the ubiquitous sphere of the law that governs both K.'s work and private existence. This is true for K. as well as for the people he interacts with; it is never clear who belongs to the court, as both his work and his private life are increasingly intermingled with his trial. He is arrested in his bedroom, and three colleagues from his bank are present during the arrest, without any explanation of their presence being offered by the text. He believes that both the interactions with his fellow tenant Fräulein Bürstner, as well as his landlady Frau Grubach somehow affect his trial. A bank client indicates

that he has heard about the trial and recommends that K. meet the court painter Titorelli. It is never clear who actually has any influence or court affiliation, but from Josef K.'s perspective, every character potentially does.

There is no private space, but the spheres of law and of work, related to one another, dominate K.'s subjective experience. Everyone and everything seems subsumed by the legal-economic sphere.²⁴⁰ K. himself links the spheres of the trial and his job:

Der Proceß war nichts anderes, als ein großes Geschäft, wie er es schon oft mit Vorteil für die Bank abgeschlossen hatte, ein Geschäft, innerhalb dessen, wie dies die Regel war, verschiedene Gefahren lauerten, die eben abgewehrt werden mußten. Zu diesem Zwecke durfte man allerdings nicht mit Gedanken an irgendeine Schuld spielen, sondern den Gedanken an den eigenen Vorteil möglichst festhalten. 168

This lack of boundaries is similar to the breakdown of the private sphere that I have described in my chapter on *Der Verschollene*. But while Karl Roßmann, the elevator boy who eventually becomes “Negro, technischer Arbeiter,”²⁴¹ is largely the victim of an unregulated economic sphere that demands maximum efficiency, K. is the victim of a highly regulated legal-economic sphere, a sphere that he himself is involved in and of which he is both victim and perpetrator (as Prokurist, with the right “to conduct basically any and all business on behalf of his bank”).²⁴² He also knows the private extension of the financial interdependencies when he reassures himself about Frau Grubach’s loyalties: Sie ist auch im übrigen von mir abhängig, denn sie hat eine größere Summe von mir geliehn” (46).

Hands as organs of economic negotiations

Hands are semantically linked to the concept of economic exchange, since in addition to the legal dimension “Verhandlung” also contains the dimension of economic exchange, in its meaning of negotiation, and its component of “Handel” as commerce. When K. tries to bribe the “Prügler” by offering him money in exchange for letting the warder go, he wants to avoid being surprised “in *Unterhandlungen* mit der Gesellschaft in der Rumpelkammer” (115).²⁴³

“Verhandlungen” and “Unterhandlungen” are closely associated with the domain of “Verkehr,” which, as Mark Anderson has shown, contains the dimensions of traffic, commerce, and social and sexual intercourse, and is an essential trope for Kafka.²⁴⁴ In *Der Proceß*, K. is, for instance, “regelmäßig im gewöhnlichen geschäftlichen Verkehr” (335) with his colleagues at the bank. K.’s workplace is at the source of economic exchange, representing the very principle of economic fungibility.

Hands are instruments of this kind of exchange as well. At his first court appearance, K. walks past a man mimicking the movement of counting money with his hands in an almost exaggerated manner (“machte mit beiden weit vorgestreckten Händen die Bewegung des Geldaufzählens,” 58). And both the first and last chapter, which constitute the conceptual framework since they were written before the other chapters, contain the phrasing “von Hand zu Hand,”

describing an economic exchange (with K.'s laundry), and a social interaction, when the executioners, in a perverse display of politeness, offer back and forth to each other the knife that moments later will be stuck into K.'s heart. Hands, as representatives and instruments of the concepts of "Verhandlungen" and "Unterhandlungen," link economic, social, legal, and erotic spheres.²⁴⁵

Hands as organs of erotic exchange and of a general principle of interchangeability

K. tries to win over "Helferinnen" (143) for his cause (the usher's wife, Fräulein Bürstner, and Leni), and at the center of these interactions is hand contact. While all of these encounters are motivated by trying to establish contact to the court or influence the outcome of his trial, the hands as instruments of erotic exchange emphasize the very notion of interchangeability rather than grant K. any sense of agency or stability. In every encounter, K. uses women as interchangeable and puts himself into an interchangeable position with other men. Each of the encounters demonstrates the fungibility of the women that are involved, as well as K.'s own fungibility.

The encounter with the usher's wife develops through the reciprocal touching of each other's hands: "Es ist ja so widerlich hier' sagte sie nach einer Pause und faßte K.'s Hand. 'Glauben Sie, daß es Ihnen gelingen wird, eine Besserung zu erreichen?' K. lächelte und drehte seine Hand ein wenig in ihren weichen Händen" (75). K., by pursuing the offer, willingly puts himself into a group of men

that engage in physical relationships with the usher's wife: her own husband the usher, the examining magistrate with whom she is compelled to have an affair, and a law student who regularly comes to grab her to carry her to the examining magistrate. When the student shows up and interrupts their encounter, the woman abandons K.: "Sie streichelte noch K.'s Hand, sprang auf und lief zum Fenster. Unwillkürlich haschte noch K. nach ihrer Hand ins Leere" (83). K expresses his frustration about his empty hand through a new use of the hand: "Nachdem er auf diese Weise die Bedenken gegen die Frau beseitigt hatte, wurde ihm das leise Zwiegespräch am Fenster zu lang, er klopfte mit den Knöcheln auf das Podium und dann auch mit der Faust" (84). After K. offends the student, he expresses his disdain for K. in hand-related metaphors: "Man hätte ihn nicht so frei herumlaufen lassen sollen . . . es war ein Mißgriff. . . . Der Untersuchungsrichter ist manchmal unbegreiflich" (85). K. reacts by reaching again for the usher's wife, but the student carries the woman away, and provokes K. by intentionally touching and groping her with his hand:

"Unnütze Reden", sagte K. und streckte die Hand nach der Frau aus.
"Kommen Sie." "Ach so", sagte der Student, "nein, nein, die bekommen Sie nicht", und mit einer Kraft, die man ihm nicht zugetraut hätte, hob er sie auf einen Arm, und lief mit gebeugtem Rücken, zärtlich zu ihr aufsehend zur Tür. Eine gewisse Angst vor K. war hiebei nicht zu verkennen, trotzdem wagte er es K. noch zu reizen, indem er mit der freien Hand den Arm der Frau streichelte und drückte. (85)

K. is left behind and eventually commiserates with the usher who indulges in a fantasy of "man-handling" the student in order to reclaim his agency:

Wäre ich nicht so abhängig, ich hätte den Studenten schon längst hier an der Wand zerdrückt. Hier neben dem Anschlagzettel. Davon träume ich immer. Hier ein wenig über dem Fußboden ist er festgedrückt, die Arme gestreckt, die Finger gespreizt,... und ringsherum Blutspritzer. (90)

K in turn promises “gelegentlich den Studenten in Behandlung zu nehmen.” Both the usher as well as his wife express frustration with the court and the amount of power that it holds over them, and like K., they both use their hands, or fantasize about it, to gain back control.

Instead of control, the hands represent a principle of erotic interchangeability and lack of individual significance. This is also the case in K.’s encounter with Fräulein Bürstner.²⁴⁶ K. is touched (“ergriffen,” 43) while looking at Fräulein Bürstner, especially her hands, and then touches her hands and finally grasps (“faßte,” 48) her and kisses her before the encounter ends with her hand: “Sie nickte müde, überließ ihm schon halb abgewendet die Hand zum Küssen, als wisse sie nichts davon und gieng gebückt in ihr Zimmer” (48). In addition to providing through her hand a substitute for the connection K. tries to make, Fräulein Bürstner leaves K. her hand almost as a substitute for herself, making it a generic, anonymous, impersonal gesture, detached from herself: “als wisse sie nichts davon.” When waiting for Fräulein Bürstner, he barely remembers how she looks, but recalls having seen her “in diesem Monat schon zweimal in entlegenen Straßen immer mit einem andern Herrn” (36). Her male partners are interchangeable, and by implication this includes him. Fräulein Bürstner, in turn, when he wants to see her again, is not available and finally sends a replacement, Fräulein Montag.

Both women are linked with Hauptmann Lanz, the man that also causes the first encounter between K. and Fräulein Bürstner to end because he knocks on the door, which causes K. to perceive him as a rival. Lanz also ends K.'s encounter with Fräulein Montag by kissing her hand and replacing K.:

Er machte eine leichte Verbeugung, die auch K. galt, gieng dann zu Fräulein Montag und küßte ihr ehrerbietig die Hand. Er war sehr gewandt in seinen Bewegungen. Seine Höflichkeit gegen Fräulein Montag stach auffallend von der Behandlung ab, die sie von K. erfahren hatte. (324)

In this spirit of interchangeability, the first visit to Fräulein Bürstner is itself framed as a substitute to the visit to his lover Elsa whom K. had meant to see that night and whom he usually sees once a week. It is further implied that she has regular visitors ("während des Tages nur vom Bett aus Besuche empfieng" [30]). The interchangeability of erotic relationships thus clearly includes allusion to prostitution, the quintessential form of erotic fungibility and the combination of erotic and economic spheres.

As if there wasn't already enough interchangeability between all parties involved, K. plans to bring the law student from his encounter with the usher's wife to Elsa:

Und er stellte sich die allerlächerlichste Szene vor, die es z.B. geben würde, wenn dieser klägliche Student, dieses aufgeblasene Kind, dieser krumme Bartträger vor Elsas Bett knien und mit gefalteten Händen um Gnade bitten würde. K. gefiel diese Vorstellung so, daß er beschloß, wenn sich nur irgendeine Gelegenheit dafür ergeben sollte, den Studenten einmal zu Elsa mitzunehmen. (86-87)

In K.'s relationship to his lawyer's nurse Leni, hands contain these dimensions of legal, social, and erotic exchange as well, and the hand has a metonymical function in the intimate encounter, which begins "als sich auf die Hand, mit der er die Tür noch festhielt, eine kleine Hand legte, viel kleiner als K.'s Hand" (139). While they talk, Leni plays with K.'s fingers, "das Gesicht über K.'s Hand gebeugt" (142), instead of looking at his face. The hands also narratively represent the sexual encounter, in the depiction of Leni's "Kralle":

"Ich habe nämlich einen solchen kleinen Fehler, sehen Sie." Sie spannte den Mittel- und Ringfinger ihrer rechten Hand auseinander, zwischen denen das Verbindungshäutchen fast bis zum obersten Gelenk der kurzen Finger reichte. K. merkte im Dunkel nicht gleich, was sie ihm zeigen wollte, sie führte deshalb seine Hand hin, damit er es abtaste. "Was für ein Naturspiel," sagte K. und fügte, als er die ganze Hand überblickt hatte, hinzu: "Was für eine hübsche Kralle!" Mit einer Art Stolz sah Leni zu, wie K. staunend immer wieder ihre zwei Finger auseinanderzog und zusammenlegte, bis er sie schließlich flüchtig küßte und losließ. (145)

Their first kiss is a kiss on the hand, and within its metonymical function, the hand becomes a proxy through which the erotic encounter and sexual act are described. It is also the hand that triggers the exchange of lovers, since Leni explicitly offers her hand, and the "defect" in the hand as a reason to convince K. to swap her for Elsa, as if it renders her unique among largely interchangeable characters. After K. kisses her hand, she exclaims: "Sie haben mich eingetauscht . . . sehen Sie nun haben Sie mich doch eingetauscht" (146).²⁴⁷

The relationship continues through secret hand affection; for instance, "sie . . . ließ im Geheimen ihre Hand von K. erfassen," and sneaks in a "Händedruck" behind

the lawyer's back (165). Here, too, though, the couple does not live happily ever after, and the interchangeability and round dance of hands continues; K. finds out about Leni's affair with Block, and his subsequent confrontation with Leni is carried out through hand contact: "Du warst im Hemd", sagte K. und wendete ihren Kopf mit der Hand wieder dem Herd zu. Sie schwieg. 'Er ist Dein Geliebter?' fragte K. Sie wollte nach dem Suppentopf greifen, aber K. nahm ihre beiden Hände und sagte: 'Nun antworte!'" (230) K. then engages in hand contact with Block ("Noch ein Weilchen", rief K. Leni abwehrend zu und zuckte ungeduldig mit der Hand, die er noch immer auf des Kaufmanns Hand liegen hatte." [244]) before all three of them get into fisticuffs:

Leni wollte gleich auf K. losfahren, aber der Kaufmann kam ihr in den Weg, wofür sie ihm mit den Fäusten einen Hieb gab. Noch mit den zu Fäusten geballten Händen lief sie dann hinter K., der aber einen großen Vorsprung hatte. Er war schon in das Zimmer des Advokaten eingetreten als ihn Leni einholte. Die Tür hatte er hinter sich fast geschlossen, aber Leni, die mit dem Fuß den Türflügel offenhielt, faßte ihn beim Arm und wollte ihn zurückziehen. Aber er drückte ihr Handgelenk so stark, daß sie unter einem Seufzer ihn loslassen mußte. (248-249)

This aspect of the hand as a mediator of exchange is part of the theme of interchangeability, fungibility, and substitution, which is also found in K.'s own profession of "Prokurist," or that of his antagonist, the "Direktor-Stellvertreter."²⁴⁸ In the chapter "Der Prügler", K. considers offering himself as "Ersatz" (115) for the guard, and the scene takes place in rooms that store replacements for office supplies.²⁴⁹ This principle of substitution is also found in the arrest scene in Fräulein Bürstner's room, where the guard handles the objects on the Verhandlungstisch in

an almost ritualistic manner, as if to carry out the trial with the objects as replacements. And K. subsequently performs this very scene again for Fräulein Bürstner, while representing all the roles himself. The theatrical dimension is further emphasized because he has to wait for Fräulein Bürstner who is at the theater, the official site of role reversal and representation.

Hands enable this role reversal and interchangeability. Moreover, while hands are characteristic of their “owner” and in this respect represent individuals and their expressions, the hands also represent their fungibility because they tend to almost substitute for the person, narratively reducing them to the depictions of their hands, and attributing actions to individuals’ hands rather than to them, as I will show in the next section.

Hands as proxies and substitutes of interpersonal relationships

In addition to being instruments of exchange and interchangeability, hands appear as near protagonists that metonymically replace the person or relationship in question. Unlike characters’ emotions or motivations, manual actions are described in detail, serving as substitutes for people and their relationship to K. For example, K. fears his uncle, and the fear manifests itself in the imagination of the uncle’s hands: “Schon damals hatte er ihn zu sehen geglaubt, wie er ein wenig gebückt, den eingedrückten Panamahut in der Linken die Rechte schon von weitem ihm entgegenstreckte und sie mit rücksichtsloser Eile über den Schreibtisch hin reichte,

alles umstoßend, was ihm im Wege war" (118). When the angry uncle waits for him after the first visit he grabs K. aggressively ("faßte ihn bei den Armen und stieß ihn gegen das Haustor, als wolle er ihn dort festnageln" (176).

The relationship to his landlady, Frau Grubach, is likewise depicted through hand action. K.'s observation of her cleaning up the dishes that were used during his arrest leads him to a general reflection about the capabilities of "lady hands":

"Frauenhände bringen doch im Stillen viel fertig, dachte er, er hätte das Geschirr vielleicht auf der Stelle zerschlagen, aber gewiß nicht hinaustragen können. Er sah Frau Grubach mit einer gewissen Dankbarkeit an" (32). The focus on her hands also illustrates an erotic component, when K. observes her knitting ("Sie saß mit einem Strickstrumpf am Tisch, auf dem noch ein Haufen alter Strümpfe lag") and eventually brings his own hands into action: "Sie saßen nun beide am Tisch und K. vergrub von Zeit zu Zeit eine Hand in die Strümpfe" (32). The metonymical process is emphasized by the fact that the immersion of the hands is expressed through the verb "vergrub," which in itself relates to the name "Grubach"; the act of immersing the hands into the wool stockings is related to the immersion fantasies of his twenty hypothetical hands as well. Even Frau Grubach, not generally thought of as an erotic vehicle for K.'s fantasies, can be included into this group through this example.

Another relationship that combines hierarchical and erotic components and features hyper-expressive hands is that with his friend "Staatsanwalt Hasterer," with whom K. often goes walking late at night, "Arm in Arm" (329), a fact that leads the bank's director to reprimand K. "Von dieser Freundschaft wußte ich gar nichts"

(335). His high status and intimidating demeanor (er “liebte es [...] die jungen Herren zu beschämen,” 327) at the legal professionals’ “Stammtisch” (327) that K. is invited to join is depicted through the focus on his hands: “Wenn er die große stark behaarte Hand mitten auf dem Tisch spreizte und sich zum untern Tischende wandte, horchte schon alles auf” (327). And if this is not enough to convince his interlocutors, he wins them over through another gesture: “schon vor seinem gestreckten Zeigefinger wichen viele zurück” (330). The relationship to Hasterer, through its homoerotic allusions, also further emphasizes the interchangeability of individuals and erotic fungibility by presenting the gender of K.’s partners as interchangeable.²⁵⁰

Hands dominate the perception to such an extent that pantomime-like gestures are even projected in the absence of actual hand movements, and onto different body parts, when K. contemplates his executioners: “Er ekelte sich vor der Reinlichkeit ihrer Gesichter. Man sah förmlich noch die säubernde Hand, die in ihre Augenwinkel gefahren, die ihre Oberlippe gerieben, die die Falten am Kinn ausgekratzt hatte” (307). This focus on hands has theatrical traits and recalls Kafka’s diary entries about the theater, where hand observations go beyond noticing gestures, but where the hand is perceived as a main actor, taking over every part of the body: “Löwy verkrampft beim Recitieren die Haut der Stirn und der Nasenwurzel, wie man nur Hände verkrampfen zu können glaubt.”²⁵¹ Another entry conjures up an invisible hand manipulating the actress’ face: “Das Auf und Zu, das Dehnen, Spitzen, Aufblühn der Lippen, als modellierten dort unsichtbar die Finger.”²⁵² At times, hands stand out to an extent that they explicitly eclipse the rest

of the body: “Die eigentlich normale Schönheit der kleinen Hände, der leichten Finger, der gewalzten Unterarme, die in sich so vollkommen sind, daß selbst der doch ungewohnte Anblick dieser Nacktheit nicht an den übrigen Körper denken läßt.”²⁵³

Hyper-expressive hands in *Der Proceß* can be seen in the context of the novel's emphasis on the theatrical.²⁵⁴ In addition, the hands function as metonymies and actors in their own right, and this hand theatricality is explored in *Der Proceß* not only through powerful gestures, but also in numerous passages featuring desks, as I show in the following section.²⁵⁵

3. Desk struggles and writing hands

Desks are repeatedly and prominently featured throughout the text. Often, desks are framed as theatrical stages on which the novel plot and individual actions (both, in German, “Handlung”) take place. Moreover, desks are shown to be a concrete and material surface; hands on desks represent the concrete and material writing hands. This can be seen not only as a reference to Kafka's own white collar profession with the desk as the site of the office work he performs, but likewise, and in similar ways, can be connected with his literary work. The author's hands are inseparable from

the prime trope for the modern everyman K.'s ordeal.

The desk as stage and the hands as actors

The principles of interchangeability and representation are layered throughout the text with the concept of theatricality. From the beginning (“war es eine Komödie, so wollte er mitspielen”[12]) to the end (K. asks his executioners: “An welchem Teater spielen Sie” [306]), there are allusions to the theater. Early on, Benjamin defined the theater as the site where Kafka experiments with the “codex of gestures”: “Das Theater ist der gegebene Ort solcher Versuchsanordnungen.”²⁵⁶ Kafka describes his own capabilities of imitation (and lack thereof):

Mein Nachahmungstrieb hat nichts Schauspielerisches, es fehlt ihm vor allem die Einheitlichkeit. Das Grobe, auffallend Charakteristische in seinem ganzen Umfange kann ich gar nicht nachahmen, ähnliche Versuche sind mir immer mißlungen sie sind gegen meine Natur. Zur Nachahmung von Details des Groben habe ich dagegen einen entscheidenden Trieb, die Manipulation gewisser Menschen mit Spazierstöcken, ihre Haltung der Hände, ihre Bewegung der Finger nachzuahmen drängt es mich und ich kann es ohne Mühe.²⁵⁷

In *Der Proceß*, such a focus on the detail of manual gestures and hand description often happens on desks and tables, which function throughout the text as miniature stages for such theatrical experiments. When Benjamin writes “An anderer Stelle spielt K. selbst Theater,” he chooses a passage that involves hands at desks:²⁵⁸

“Langsam suchte er mit vorsichtig aufwärts gedrehten Augen zu erfahren, was sich oben ereignete, nahm vom Schreibtisch ohne hinzusehn eines der Papiere, legte es

auf die flache Hand und hob es allmählich, während er selbst aufstand zu den Herren hinauf" (174).

As early as 1910, Kafka writes in his diary about his own desk and likens it in a detailed manner to a theater:

aus dem offenen Fach unter dem Tischaufsatz hervor Broschüren, alte Zeitungen, Kataloge Ansichtskarten, Briefe, alle zum Teil zerrissen, zum Teil geöffnet in Form einer Freitreppe hervorkommen, dieser unwürdige Zustand verdirbt alles. Einzelne verhältnismäßig riesige Dinge des Parterres treten in möglichster Aktivität auf, als wäre es im Teater erlaubt, dass im Zuschauerraum der Kaufmann seine Geschäftsbücher ordnet, der Zimmermann hämmert, der Officier den Säbel schwenkt, der Geistliche dem Herzen zuredet, der Gelehrte dem Verstand, der Politiker dem Bürgersinn, dass die Liebenden sich nicht zurückhalten u. s. w.²⁵⁹

The desk as well as the projected theater stage are a site where a variety of realms are, somewhat illicitly, amalgamated.²⁶⁰ This doubled desk-theater space even contains a "Rumpelkammer," a space that will likewise make it into *Der Proceß*, as well as props that we find on the Verhandlungstisch, such as the matches. It also conjures up a gallery-like setting that anticipates the courtroom in the novel, and seems to anticipate many scenes, such as the tight, dirty spaces in the courthouse/apartment building where families live, or the dark room of Huld:

Das nächst höhere, durch die kleinen geschlossenen Seitenschubladen schon eingeeengte offene Fach des Aufsatzes ist nichts als eine Rumpelkammer, so als würde der niedrige Balkon des Zuschauerraumes, im Grunde die sichtbarste Stelle des Teaters für die gemeinsten Leute reserviert für alte Lebemänner, bei denen der Schmutz allmählich von innen nach außen kommt, rohe Kerle, welche die Füße über das Balkongeländer herunterhängen lassen, Familien mit soviel Kindern, dass man nur kurz hinschaut, ohne sie zählen zu können richten hier den Schmutz armer Kinderstuben ein (es rinnt ja schon im Parterre) im dunklen Hintergrund

sitzen unheilbare Kranke, man sieht sie glücklicherweise nur wenn man hineinleuchtet u. s. w. In diesem Fach liegen alte Papiere die ich längst weggeworfen hätte wenn ich einen Papierkorb hätte, Bleistifte mit abgebrochenen Spitzen, eine leere Zündholzschachtel, ein Briefbeschwerer aus Karlsbad, ein Lineal mit einer Kante, deren Holprigkeit für eine Landstraße zu arg wäre, viele Kragenknöpfe, stumpfe Rasiermessereinlagen (für die ist kein Platz auf der Welt), Krawattenzwicker und noch ein schwerer eiserner Briefbeschwerer.²⁶¹

The diary entry ends in a moment of authorial self-reflection, because the desk is always also, and foremost, the space of writing: “Die angezündete Glühlampe, die stille Wohnung, das Dunkel draußen, die letzten Augenblicke des Wachseins sie geben mir das Recht zu schreiben und sei es auch das Elendste. Und dieses Recht benütze ich eilig. Das bin ich also.”²⁶²

Throughout *Der Proceß*, desks, and other tables and wooden surfaces appear frequently, linking the spheres of the bank work, the trial plot, and the space of writing. K.’s own writing appears most explicitly in his own attempts to write the “Eingabe,” the autobiographical project for the court that he never actually manages to write.²⁶³ This layering of the legal and economic spheres with that of writing is for instance present in a passage where K. ponders the difficulty and dangers of writing the Eingabe at his desk at the bank, remembering one of the frequent hand struggles on the desk featuring the deputy director:

Wenn sich aber auch K. dies alles durchzuführen getraute, die Schwierigkeit der Abfassung der Eingabe war überwältigend. . . . Er erinnerte sich, wie er einmal an einem Vormittag, als er gerade mit Arbeit überhäuft war, plötzlich alles zur Seite geschoben und den Schreibblock vorgenommen hatte, um versuchsweise den Gedankengang einer derartigen Eingabe zu entwerfen und ihn vielleicht dem schwerfälligen Advokaten zur Verfügung zu stellen, und wie gerade in diesem Augenblick, die Tür des Direktionszimmers sich

öffnete und der Direktor-Stellvertreter mit großem Gelächter eintrat. Es war für K. damals sehr peinlich gewesen, trotzdem der Direktor-Stellvertreter natürlich nicht über die Eingabe gelacht hatte, von der er nichts wußte, sondern über einen Börsenwitz, den er eben gehört hatte, einen Witz, der zum Verständnis eine Zeichnung erforderte, die nun der Direktor-Stellvertreter, über K.'s Tisch gebeugt mit K.'s Bleistift, den er ihm aus der Hand nahm, auf dem Schreibblock ausführte, der für die Eingabe bestimmt gewesen war. (169-170)

Desks are prominently featured from the beginning, as K. immediately searches a desk for his birth certificate before presenting his "Legitimationspapiere" (12). In many scenes, the desk is at the center of the interiors that are described, and the hand is the center on the desk. The hand assists while reading,²⁶⁴ sorts through papers, or rests on the table and is the object of contemplation, such as in the beginning of the novel where K. observes one of the warders comparing the length of his fingers. Hasterer's and Grubach's hands also appear on the surface of tables. When K. prepares a visit where he is supposed to show an Italian bank colleague the cathedral, he prepares the tour by writing: "seltene Vokabeln, die er zur Führung im Dom benötigte, aus dem Wörterbuch." The deputy director takes the dictionary out of his hand ("nahm ihm das Wörterbuch aus der Hand" [277]). When K. finally gets it back, holding it in his hands and writing on the desk become the center around which everything else revolves: "– das alles bewegte sich um K. als um seinen Mittelpunkt, während er selbst die Wörter die er brauchte, zusammenstellte, dann im Wörterbuch suchte, dann herschrieb, dann sich in ihrer Aussprache übte und schließlich auswendig zu lernen versuchte" (277).

In general, his feelings towards his trial are projected onto his desk at the

bank: “Aber statt zu arbeiten drehte er sich in seinem Sessel, verschob langsam einige Gegenstände auf dem Tisch, ließ dann aber, ohne es zu wissen den ganzen Arm ausgestreckt auf der Tischplatte liegen und blieb mit gesenktem Kopf unbeweglich sitzen” (149). When K. is absorbed by thoughts of his trial, his gaze onto the desk seems to reinforce this: “Und jetzt sollte er für die Bank arbeiten?—Er sah auf den Schreibtisch hin.—Jetzt sollte er Parteien vorlassen und mit ihnen verhandeln?” (177). The desk is a space of tedious work that is increasingly avoided: “Ohne besondern Grund, nur um vorläufig noch nicht zum Schreibtisch zurückkehren zu müssen, öffnete er das Fenster” (178).

K. especially worries about the influence of his trial on his work and fears the deputy director’s hands on his desk. “Er glaubte dann zu sehn, wie der Direktor-Stellvertreter, der ja immer auf der Lauer gewesen war, von Zeit zu Zeit in sein Bureau kam, sich an seinen Schreibtisch setzte, seine Schriftstücke durchsuchte . . ., ja vielleicht sogar Fehler aufdeckte, von denen sich K. während der Arbeit jetzt immer aus tausend Richtungen bedroht sah und die er nicht mehr vermeiden konnte” (270). The fear that the deputy director might find a mistake literally materializes when he finds an actual mistake on the desk—not in K.’s papers, but on the wooden surface, taking the play with literal and figurative meanings to a performative level, with the desk as stage and the hand as protagonist: “Aber der Direktor-Stellvertreter tat, als habe er gerade jetzt dort eine Lockerung bemerkt, und versuchte den Fehler dadurch zu beseitigen, daß er mit dem Zeigefinger auf die Balustrade loshiebt” (342-343). K.’s attempts to gain the director’s attention likewise consist in hand movements on the desk:

In der Eile seiner Rede hatte K. gar nicht Zeit, den Direktor-Stellvertreter ausdrücklich von seiner Arbeit an der Balustrade abzuziehen, nur zwei oder dreimal strich er während des Vorlesens mit der freien Hand wie beruhigend über die Balustrade hin, um damit, fast ohne es selbst genau zu wissen, dem Direktor-Stellvertreter zu zeigen, daß die Balustrade keinen Fehler habe und daß selbst wenn sich einer vorfinden sollte, augenblicklich das Zuhören wichtiger und auch anständiger sei als alle Verbesserungen. (343-344)

K., trying to redirect the attention, gets up from his desk, “und den Finger unter eine Zahl gedrückt reichte er dem Direktor-Stellvertreter ein Papier entgegen“ (344-345).

The section “Kampf mit dem Direktor-Stellvertreter” features a battle of the hands that are a miniature rendition of K.’s struggles for agency in his trial. K.’s desk even mirrors the court’s architecture by representing a miniature of the first courtroom with its gallery: “Die Platte von K.’s Schreibtisch war von einer niedrigen geschnitzten Balustrade umgeben” (342). The hands on the desk parallel the court plot, and both evoke a theater stage. Just as K. tries to control his trial through use of his hands, the struggle with the deputy director is carried out through hands. The desk and the hand thus seem to be condensations of many of the important spaces and scenes of the novel. Similarly, the fear of the uncle first manifests itself in K.’s fear of his reckless and impatient hand on the desk, and his brutal appearance mimics the hand-desk scene where the uncle creates chaos on the desk. There are distinctive traces of the desk in the trial, creating parallels between miniature stage and trial plot.

On this desk-stage, the moving or resting hand of the writing and reading

subject is an actor in its own right, and the props are books, papers, and pens. Hands reenact the concepts of "negotiation" ("Verhandlung") and even "action" and "plot" ("Handlung"); for example when K. is working on summarizing "das ganze Leben in den kleinsten *Handlungen* und Ereignissen" (170), or when characters explain their "Handlungsweise" (113).²⁶⁵ The writing hand enters the novel plot, and the desk serves as a site where the realms of the theatrical, legal, economic, and aesthetic are condensed.

Material hands on desks

The "Kampf mit dem Direktor-Stellvertreter" is not only literally carried out with the hands on the desk, but is also introduced with a description focusing on the materiality of the desk: "Der ganze Schreibtisch war vorzügliche Arbeit und auch die Balustrade saß fest im Holz" (342). It likewise ends with the deputy director's comment "Schlechtes Holz" (345). The material aspect is further explored when K. fails to get the deputy director's attention, and specifically so because of the latter's distraction by the desk itself:

Aber den Direktor-Stellvertreter hatte, wie dies bei lebhaften nur geistig tätigen Menschen oft geschieht, diese handwerksmäßige Arbeit in Eifer gebracht, ein Stück der Balustrade war nun wirklich hochgezogen und es handelte sich jetzt darum die Säulchen wieder in die zugehörigen Löcher hineinzubringen. Das war schwieriger als alles bisherige. Der Direktor-Stellvertreter mußte aufstehn und mit beiden Händen versuchen die Balustrade in die Platte zu drücken. (344)

It is the deputy director's profession as white collar employee that causes him to get carried away by his craft project on the desk. In its somewhat hyperbolic description ("Das war schwieriger als alles bisherige") and through the explicit reference to the estrangement from his own hands, the passage can also be read almost as a parody of a contemporaneous fetishization of the arts and crafts, and tactility in general as a guarantor of immediacy and authenticity in an increasingly abstract world.²⁶⁶ Singling out the "handwerksmäßige Arbeit" as an antidote to the abstract bank work is a moment comparable to K.'s repeated attempts to establish immediacy and direct contact through touch to compensate for his own intangible problems.

By featuring hands on desks, especially in scenes where the material of the desk is described in detail, the concrete act of touching the surfaces is emphasized. Knocking hands are often an attempt to establish contact and make the abstract more concrete or create the illusion of action, such as when K. is impatiently waiting for the conversation between the student and the usher's wife to stop and compensates by handling the wooden "Podium" with his knuckles and fist. For K., this distraction is no escape, just as the tactile encounters do not help him establish a connection to the court and its members; nevertheless, the contact between hand and desk in certain passages emphasizes a desire for an artisanal quality of touch.

The motif of the "handwerksmäßige Arbeit" occurs throughout the text. When he makes his first appearance in the court, he is asked if he is a "Zimmermaler" (61, 65). This follows a chain of associations with names and occupations that evoke artisanal professions: When K. climbs the stairs and knocks

at random doors, he thinks about Hauptmann Lanz, who had interrupted the meeting with Fräulein Bürstner by knocking on the door and whose fresh, vigorous appearance, hands-on profession, and maybe even his name, evocative of a sharp pointy weapon, seem to intimidate him; he decides to ask for a “*Tischler* Lanz,” a name and person he invents. This carpenter, together with the *Zimmermaler* and *Hauptmann* also evoke the profession of “Zimmermann,” like “Tischler” a woodworking profession, (also alluded to in the “roh gezimmerte Türen” [92] of the court attic), both evocative of artistic expression on the one hand, and on the other of manual labor and Kafka’s expertise in the technicalities and economics of the woodworking profession, in his professional capacity of assessing the safety features of wood planing machines as I have shown in chapter 2, but even as a personal interest.²⁶⁷ The word *Zimmermaler* itself combines an artistic profession, that of painter, with that of blue collar, manual labor, and thus draws together the realms of art and blue-collar work. A similar combination of professions occurs when K. visits the painter Titorelli, whose apartment is next to a “Klempfnerwerkstätte”: “Die Tür der Werkstätte war offen, drei Gehilfen standen im Halbkreis um irgendein Werkstück auf das sie mit den Hämmern schlugen” (188). This layering of art and manual labor emphasizes a moment of creativity that is connected to the material aspects of the artistic endeavor, but it is a moment that never offers any escape or salvation, and instead is always linked to the court.²⁶⁸

The alter ego of “Tischler” emphasizes the reference to tables and desks (and contains the table in its name), and the material of wood. Wood as a material appears throughout the novel (for instance in Titorelli’s apartment where “Alles,

Fußboden, Wände und Zimmerdecke war aus Holz" 193) almost as if conjured up by a gaze on the desk: "Die Holztreppe erklärte nichts, solange man sie auch ansah. Da bemerkte K. einen kleinen Zettel neben dem Ausgang, gieng hinüber und las in einer kindlichen, ungeübten Schrift: „Ausgang zu den Gerichtskanzleien" (87-88).

The writing hand

Immediately after contemplating the wooden staircase, the reader's focus is directed to the piece of paper with handwriting on it, which can be seen as an allusion to the manuscript in front of the author. The prominence of the desk hands as well as this allusion to the handwriting before the backdrop of a wooden surface indicate that the materiality of the desk can be connected to the materiality of writing.

Malcolm Pasley has described the general importance of the material, concrete conditions of writing, such as the writing space and writing utensils for the form and content of Kafka's writing.²⁶⁹ In "Die Handschrift redet," Pasley describes peculiarities in Kafka's handwriting in the manuscript of *Der Proceß*.²⁷⁰ He points out how difficult phases in the writing process can be seen within handwriting that becomes smaller and more labored, cramming more words onto one page. When K. complains about laboring to lay out "das ganze Leben in den kleinsten Handlungen" (170) for his "Eingabe," one can imagine K.'s writing itself to become smaller and smaller along with the increasingly smaller movements of the hand on the desk,

calling to mind the painter Titorelli's description of uninspired painting as a model for labored writing: "der künstlerische Schwung geht zum großen Teil verloren" (204). In turn, Pasley describes the handwriting of successful work phases as marked by almost boisterous initial letters, and generally dynamic, large letters. When K. is "nur noch entzückt sowohl von der Art der Rede des Kanzleidirektors als auch von den sanften wellenförmigen Handbewegungen, mit denen er sie begleitete", the movements of the author's writing hand can be associated here as well. "Die Entstehung der erzählerischen Werke Kafkas", writes Pasley "ist ungewöhnlich eng und mit ungewöhnlicher Ausschließlichkeit an die Entstehung des ursprünglichen Textes gebunden. Ja, sie ist dermaßen eng daran gebunden, daß man behaupten darf, er habe diese Werke geradezu erschrieben."²⁷¹ The fixation on the moment, and motion, of writing seems mirrored in a description of a photograph, a "Momentphotographie" of K.'s lover Elsa. The picture, taken after a "Wirbeltanz" - "ihr Rock flog noch im Faltenwurf der Drehung um sie her" (144) focuses on the motion,²⁷² while almost neglecting the actual content, a fact that is reflected when Leni inquires about the person on the picture and K. replies: "Ja ich habe noch nicht einmal das Bild so genau angesehen" (144-145).

The writing hand on the desk may be the origin of the preoccupation with hand motions and gestures in the text; as Rüdiger Campe has shown, literary writing for Kafka is decidedly writing by hand, including the corporeal and gestural dimensions of writing.²⁷³ The influence of the movements of the writing hand can be linked to the moment of Kafka's writing that Gerhard Neumann calls "Schreibstrom": the focus on the act and process of writing in contrast to the

printed, published text which he links to the “Behelfsstrategie des ‘verschleppten Prozesses’, der unendlichen Verlängerung jenes Schreibstroms, der die — auf die Körpererfahrung hin orientierte — Ich-Instanz freilich nur solange aufrechterhält, solange er nicht versiegt.”²⁷⁴

These descriptions of Kafka’s writing and the traces of the writing hand in the novel’s plot can be linked with Kafka’s own descriptions of his work on *Der Proceß*. He notes good and bad working phases in terms of actively “grasping” the material and the passive act of being grasped: “Vierzehn Tage gute Arbeit, zum Teil vollständiges Begreifen meiner Lage,” Kafka writes on October 7, 1914.²⁷⁵ On August 30, 1914, he had written “Ich fühle allzusehr die Grenzen meiner Fähigkeit, die, wenn ich nicht vollständig ergriffen bin, zweifellos nur eng gezogen sind. Und ich glaube selbst im Ergriffensein nur in diese engen Grenzen gezogen zu werden.”²⁷⁶ Here, the lack of being “ergriffen” means a deficit in the writing, implying that good writing can consist both in grasping the material as well as being grasped, so long as metaphorical hand contact exists.

Writing hands alternate between being in and lacking control, which is related to K.’s alternation between grasping and groping, and being grabbed, groped, and seized. In the diaries and letters, passages that focus exclusively on the writing hands in terms of successful and unsuccessful authorship almost constitute a sub-“genre” in their own right. In a letter from April 18, 1914, he writes: “Das Schreiben selbst verführt oft zu falschen Fixierungen. Es gibt eine Schwerkraft der Sätze, der man sich nicht entziehen kann. . . . ich habe meine Fähigkeit des

Schreibens gar nicht in der Hand. Sie kommt und geht wie ein Gespenst.”²⁷⁷ Hands are directly linked to the experience of inspiration and creativity—they physically draw words “aus der Strömung heraus, griffweise.”²⁷⁸ Confidence is experienced as if holding one’s own capabilities in one’s hand (“wieder aller meiner Fähigkeiten mir bewußt geworden, als hielte ich sie in der Hand.”²⁷⁹ Difficulties in finishing a text lead to the perception “daß dann der Schluß von außenher geradezu mit Händen beendet werden muß, die nicht nur arbeiten sondern sich auch festhalten müssen.”²⁸⁰ Flaws in the written text can be measured by hands, as when Kafka notes: “Die ungeordneten Sätze dieser Geschichte mit Lücken daß man beide Hände dazwischen stecken könnte.”²⁸¹

This ambivalence of the writing hand is also mirrored in Kafka’s reflections on “Das Urteil,” written in 1912; when Kafka was writing *Der Proceß* in 1914, this text still constituted his ultimate writing success for himself. When reading “Das Urteil” for corrections, he notes autobiographical connections and describes the mastery over his own story with the manual skills of a midwife: “Es ist dies notwendig, denn die Geschichte ist wie eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir herausgekommen und nur ich habe die Hand, die bis zum Körper dringen kann und Lust dazu hat.”²⁸² When Kafka reflects on his initial plan, he describes hand movements as well, but this time they express a lack of control: “Als ich mich zum Schreiben niedersetzte, wollte ich . . . einen Krieg beschreiben, ein junger Mann sollte aus seinem Fenster eine Menschenmenge über die Brücke herankommen sehn, dann aber drehte sich mir alles unter den Händen.”²⁸³ Here, the lack of control is a sign for the uninterrupted momentum of writing. Likewise,

surrendering the hand to the momentum of reading is a sign for the “Zweifellosigkeit der Geschichte,”²⁸⁴ and when he reads it to friends, it is accompanied by inadvertent hand movements: “Gegen Schluß fuhr mir meine Hand unregiert und wahrhaftig vor dem Gesicht herum.”²⁸⁵

Even successful writing contains this ambivalence of controlling and controlled hands since it occurs as the right balance between control over the hand and surrendering the hand to the momentum of the story. The uncontrolled hand can be both a gesture of desperation and capitulation, rapture, or ecstasy, an ambivalence that is captured in a diary passage that closely resembles K.’s last gesture in the trial: “Der Verzückte und der Ertrinkende, beide heben die Arme. Der erste bezeugt Eintracht, der zweite Widerstreit mit den Elementen.”²⁸⁶ K.’s final gesture as well may reflect both the success and desperation of its writing. But whether the loss of control means success or failure of writing, the writing hand is inherently dependent on the “elements,” the social contexts and surroundings, just like in the examples of the autobiographical allusions he detects, or in the company of the friends to whom he reads, showing that the hand is always connected to the influence of the surroundings, acting as midwife, in context rather than in isolation. Similarly, even Kafka’s play with literal and figurative meanings can be read as a reflection of the necessity of inscribing oneself into the social conventions of language, staging K.’s struggles in his trial as the author’s struggle with the autonomy of poetic language.²⁸⁷ Kafka’s self-fashioning as a writer shows that writing is always a social act, just like the gestures in *Der Proceß* are inherently connected to the social sphere of the novel,²⁸⁸ and K.’s own writing is connected to

the court and takes place at the desk in his bank. And despite Kafka's recurrent complaints that his own office writing was detrimental to his literary writing, it can and should be seen as its origin and condition.²⁸⁹

For Kafka, writing remains framed as an existential struggle until his last diary entry, where writing appears as a struggle but also as collaboration with outside forces:

Immer ängstlicher im Niederschreiben. Es ist begreiflich. Jedes Wort, gewendet in der Hand der Geister -- dieser Schwung der Hand ist ihre charakteristische Bewegung -- wird zum Spieß, gekehrt gegen den Sprecher. Eine Bemerkung wie diese ganz besonders. Und so ins Unendliche. Der Trost wäre nur: es geschieht ob Du willst oder nicht. Und was Du willst, hilft nur unmerklich wenig. Mehr als Trost ist: Auch Du hast Waffen.²⁹⁰

The poetics of hand control and surrender could also be at the source of the random, arbitrary, and coincidental elements of the court plot. This does not only include the uncontrolled movement of hands, such as when K. accidentally hurts the warder or "unwillkürlich" (171) touches the bell. It is also a principle of organization, or rather, disorganization, throughout the text, where K. makes accidental, random, unconscious decisions: "Schließlich stieg er doch die erste Treppe hinauf und spielte in Gedanken mit einer Erinnerung an den Ausspruch des Wächters Willem, daß das Gericht von der Schuld angezogen werde, woraus eigentlich folgte, daß das Untersuchungszimmer an der Treppe liegen mußte, *die K. zufällig wählte*" (55). In the cathedral chapter, too, he turns around "zufällig."²⁹¹ The moment of accidental, unconscious development could be seen as related to the contemplation of the writing hand on the desk, with changing levels of control over

the hand and the written words and novel plot, seemingly following the movement of the momentum of writing, rather than creating it.²⁹² This moment of conscious surrender occurs at the end of *Der Proceß* when K. both drags and is dragged by the executioners.

The momentum of the writing hand, and the focus on this moving hand on the desk, shifts the observer of this hand from the position of author and originator of the movement into the position of passive spectator of his own hand. The struggle between active and passive modes of observation, and agency in general, is present throughout the text.²⁹³ Kafka takes up this motif even more explicitly in a short piece that deals exclusively with the observation of the narrator's own hands, the text that will be the subject of my next chapter, but in *Der Proceß*, too, the desk and the writing hand are the laboratory on which many of the struggles for agency are fought.

Fragmenting and fragmented, executing and executed hands

Another variation of the motif of the desk is Huld's "Dienstmädchenzimmer," in which Kaufmann Block is kept, writing and reading. There is no proper desk for space reasons, rather: "Am Kopfende des Bettes war eine Vertiefung in der Mauer, dort standen peinlich geordnet eine Kerze, Tintenfaß und Feder, sowie ein Bündel Papiere, wahrscheinlich Proceßschriften" (247). The meticulously arranged objects evoke a ritual space similar to the cathedral and a space of confinement, similar to

the Rumpelkammer (“peinlich geordnet” even contains a notion of pain), which itself is a fusion of ritual space of punishment as well as a place where writing and printing supplies are stored (“Drucksorten und Tintenflaschen,” 117), also linking the aesthetic space of writing with that of the sphere of the law. Similar to Block’s workspace, K.’s desk is in proximity to the space of confinement of the “Rumpelkammer.” In conjunction with the proper name Block, the space in the wall also evokes the stone in which it is hewn, as well as the writing paper (“Schreibblock,” 169, 170) and therefore presents a link between writing space and the stone quarry in the end, linking the scenery of writing with that of the court plot and the space of execution.²⁹⁴ Block’s fate also anticipates K.’s execution in the quarry when K. likens him to a dog, a comparison he uses for himself just before he dies.²⁹⁵

The stone quarry is a charged site, and one that, like K.’s desk and Block’s stone desk, links the motif of writing with that of the trial plot. For Block and K., the activities at the desk have become a matter of life and death. Block has practically moved into the tiny room in his lawyer’s house, and K. mixes his bank work with his work on the “Eingabe” and trial strategies. For both, sitting down to read and write is an existential struggle, reminiscent of Kafka’s self-fashioning as a writer in his letters and diaries. This may well be connected to the fact that for Kafka, writing during the day is indeed a question of life and death, where he is crafting sentences about the vulnerable human body, and having K. executed in a quarry can also be seen in context of one of his longer and influential texts written in his day job, in which he treats the prevention of accidents in quarries.²⁹⁶

Framing the novel with a death in the quarry is not only a statement about work practices, but about a legal sphere that threatens the individual subject through its all-encompassing control. As I have described in the last chapter, the change to a no-fault system of compensation and the move away from establishing guilt on an individual basis creates an insurance state where everyone is equally innocent, but also equally guilty, independent from individual cases, and where a certain “Schuldverhältnis,” or debt to the system, is inherent.²⁹⁷ The German notion of “Schuld” links moral and legal guilt with economic debt, and K.’s Schuld seems to contain all three dimensions. Waking up “ohne daß er etwas Böses getan hätte” (7) and being condemned to a death in the quarry, because it is an accepted risk within the economic and legal sphere, could be seen as a result of such a system. In this sense, the quarry death and the novel as a whole could be seen as a European version complementary to the social critique in *Der Verschollene*: a dystopic portrayal of omnipresent unreigned capitalism on the one hand, and of an omnipresent insurance and welfare state, including surveillance and total control over its subjects’ bodies on the other hand. While K.’s trial is usually seen as a state of exception, it is also very much defined as a state of normalcy and business as usual for the accused. Even the arresting warders are explicit about this: “Sie sollen auch in ihrer gewöhnlichen Lebensweise nicht gehindert sein” (26).

In *Der Proceß*, until the quarry death, the body and hands of the white collar employee are more indirectly threatened than those of the blue collar worker from the previous chapters, for instance by likening K.’s hands to red hot pliers, or the claws of an animal. But just before his executioners come to get him, K. instinctively

puts on gloves: "Ohne daß ihm der Besuch angekündigt gewesen wäre, saß K. gleichfalls schwarz angezogen in einem Sessel in der Nähe der Türe und zog langsam neue scharf sich über die Finger spannende Handschuhe an, in der Haltung wie man Gäste erwartet" (305). This slow motion of putting on gloves creates an uneasy moment of suspense and anticipation, and "scharf" evokes the blades that will soon execute him. Through the notion of the sharpness in proximity of the fingers the scene can even be linked to the hand injuries that he encounters during his work at the insurance company.²⁹⁸

K.'s own hands seem threatened by the "sharp" gloves, and at the same time the gloves create a barrier between him and the world, perhaps the same barrier that separates him from genuine contact and connections and leads him to overcompensate with his tactile transgressions and fantasies of twenty hands. His hands are not innocent, because he is an active participant in the creation of fungibility through his treatment of others and through his work.²⁹⁹ Insofar as far as K., through his desk job, can be considered a writer, he unwittingly puts himself in the company in which he finds himself at the end, when he puts writers and executioners in the same category while he criticizes the "große Organisation" (339) of the court and its "Gefolge von Dienern, Schreibern, Gendarmen und andern Hilfskräften, vielleicht sogar Henkern, ich scheue vor dem Wort nicht zurück" (69).

Indeed, the stone quarry itself can be linked with writing also in the sense that the method of fragmentation is a motif in and structuring principle of the novel. "Steinbruch" makes this even more explicit since it contains the notion of

fragmentation, also mirrored in K.'s "brechenden Augen" (312) in his moment of death. Throughout the text, K. becomes progressively "zerstreut" (32).³⁰⁰ He cannot concentrate on what is important, and this becomes one of the main effects that the trial has on him. He is warned at the beginning: "Wir raten Ihnen, zerstreuen Sie sich nicht durch nutzlose Gedanken, sondern sammeln Sie sich, es werden große Anforderungen an Sie gestellt werden" (15). Nevertheless, K. is "bei der Arbeit zerstreut" (117). The fragmentation in the writing process is the opposite of the former ideal method of uninterrupted writing ("in einem Zug")³⁰¹ according to the ideal of "Das Urteil." *Der Proceß* is a work of fragmentation; Kafka carefully grouped together passages for assembling them later, just as K.'s clothes are carefully folded and layered in the quarry, "wie Dinge die man noch gebrauchen wird, wenn auch nicht in allernächster Zeit" (310). And K.'s statements preceding and following the fantasy about the twenty hands, which is almost an admission of guilt, contains both the self-criticism of the protagonist and that of his author, who wrote the chapter entitled "Ende" in the beginning, right after the first chapter, thus instead of writing from beginning to end producing interchangeable chapters:³⁰²

das einzige was ich jetzt tun kann ist, bis zum Ende den ruhig einteilenden Verstand behalten. Ich wollte immer mit zwanzig Händen in die Welt hineinfahren und überdies zu einem nicht zu billigenden Zweck. [...] Soll man mir nachsagen dürfen, daß ich am Anfang des Processes ihn beenden und jetzt an seinem Ende ihn wieder beginnen will. Ich will nicht, daß man das sagt. (308)

The twenty hands are K.'s hands that, unlike Frau Grubach's "lady hands," want to demolish ("zerschlagen," 32) the dishes on the table, anticipating the fragmentation

of stone at the site of execution, and reflecting that of the text. The twenty hands are the admission of a lack of control by K. in regard to his own story, but at least as much a statement about the author's writing hands.³⁰³ K.'s own final gesture in the quarry--"Er hob die Hände und spreizte alle Finger" (312)—also emphasizes the notion of fragmentation, with the individual fingers branching out, breaking into fragments and emphasizing the multiplicity by referring to "alle Finger," rather than "die Finger" or "die Hände" which would be a more common and expected way of phrasing it. Regarding the connection to writing, I have mentioned above the diary entry that contains a very similar ambivalence of this gesture, which is also conveyed in regard to other gestures of spread hands in the text, when the student's spread out hands surrounded by blood splatter signify surrender, whereas Hasterer's "große stark behaarte Hand" (327) spread out on the table suggests control. Both examples can be connected to the very different kinds of K.'s guilt, since the student is the erotic rival of the usher's wife's husband, as is K. himself, and Hasterer, the legal power player has met K. initially in the bank in the "verhältnismäßig hohen Stellung die er dort einnahm" (17).

Multiple hands, multiple meanings

The twenty hands, the ten fingers, and the large number of hands throughout the text emphasize a moment of multiplicity in regard to the hands. The twenty hands can be understood as the hands of the writer, and as the hands with which K. participates in the exchange of money and women and the fungibility of the modern

subject, and with which he defends himself against that same threat, trying to get a hold of his trial, groping his harem of “Helferinnen,” and acting out the fights on the desk. Hands are theatrical and expressive, self-referential, as well as a trope for the attacks on the modern subject. In their polysemy and multiplicity, they link and condense the aesthetic and political dimensions within the text, and of the text. Such multiplicity in this trope goes along with the many scenes where objects uncannily appear in groups and which are associated with a lack of control, and links the attack on the individuality of the modern subject with artistic self-reflection and notions of originality: the flogger scene that ends with a copy machine (“Kopiermaschine,” 117, the “enemy” of handwriting) and is itself repeated and copied the next day; Titorelli’s “Heidelandschaften” or Fräulein Bürstner’s room, where everything is doubled after Fräulein Montag moves in. This motif is also taken up in the coupling of characters, from the warders to the executioners, and even in the overkill of K.’s death by two pairs of hands, one strangling him while the other turns the knife in K.’s heart, twice: “Aber an K.’s Gurgel legten sich die Hände des einen Herrn, während der andere das Messer ihm ins Herz stieß und zweimal dort drehte” (312).

K.’s twenty hands (and the multiple hands throughout the text) are a testament to the text’s play with multiple meanings and layers. But even a single pair of hands can create a play with meaning and interchangeability, since it still consists of two hands. In a notebook entry that Kafka wrote after he had abandoned the manuscript of *Das Schloß*, which deals with many of the same issues that we find in *Der Proceß*, he writes about the relationship between hands and “Verstand” again.

Here, the hand is the actual site of the mind, and meaning. This stresses the importance of the figure of the hand as the site of the “spirit” of his authorship. However, it also makes matters more complicated, because two hands create a moment of continuous interchangeability and ultimately ambivalence, confusion, and tension:

Ich habe meinen Verstand in die Hand vergraben, fröhlich, aufrecht trage ich den Kopf, aber die Hand hängt müde hinab, der Verstand zieht sie zur Erde. Sieh nur die kleine, harthäutige, aderndurchzogene, faltenzerrissene, hochädrige, fünffingrige Hand, wie gut daß ich den Verstand in diesen unscheinbaren Behälter retten konnte. Besonders vorzüglich ist, daß ich zwei Hände habe. Wie im Kinderspiel frage ich: In welcher Hand habe ich meinen Verstand, niemand kann es erraten, denn ich kann durch Falten der Hände im Nu den Verstand aus einer Hand in die andere übertragen.³⁰⁴

In addition, the hand is “harthäutig” and “faltenerissen,” not quite the qualities of the bureaucrat’s hand or the author’s, manipulating primarily his “Verstand.” Kafka amusedly writes in his diary about his friend, the actor Yitzchak Löwy, who is mocked by a working-class friend for his delicate hands:

Die Arbeit in der Mützenfabrik und sein Freund, der Socialist, der jeden für einen Bourgeois hält, der nicht genau so arbeitet wie er, z. B. Löwy mit seinen feinen Händen, der sich Sonntags langweilt, der das Lesen als etwas Üppiges verachtet, selbst nicht lesen kann und Löwy mit Ironie bittet ihm einen Brief vorzulesen, den er bekommen hat.³⁰⁵

But the hands of the first person speaker who has hidden his “reason,” and possibly the meaning of the text, in them are more like the stoker’s “rissige”³⁰⁶ hand in consistency. There may be an identification between author and stoker via Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s “Über Charaktere im Roman und im Drama”, specifically a passage in an fictional conversation between Balzac and a German interlocutor by

the name of Hammer-Purgstall that directly compares the artist and the stoker, specifically in the quality that neither can escape the world in which he lives:

Es kann keiner aus seiner Welt heraus. Haben Sie eine größere Reise auf einem Dampfschiffe gemacht? Entsinnen Sie sich da einer sonderbaren, beinahe Mitleid erregenden Gestalt, die gegen Abend aus einer Lücke des Maschinenraumes auftauchte und sich für eine Viertelstunde oben aufhielt, um Luft zu schöpfen? Der Mann war halbnackt, er hatte ein geschwärztes Gesicht und rote, entzündete Augen. Man hat Ihnen gesagt, daß es der Heizer der Maschine ist. Sooft er heraufkam, taumelte er; er trank gierig einen großen Krug Wasser leer, er legte sich auf einen Haufen Werg und spielte mit dem Schiffshund, er warf ein paar scheue, fast schwachsinnige Blicke auf die schönen und fröhlichen Passagiere der Ersten Kajüte, die auf Deck waren, sich an den Sternen des südlichen Himmels zu entzücken; er atmete, dieser Mensch, mit Gier, so wie er getrunken hatte, die Luft, welche durchfeuchtet war von einer in Tau vergehenden Nachtwolke und dem Duft von unberührten Palmeninseln, der über das Meer heranschwebte; und er verschwand wieder im Bauch des Schiffes, ohne die Sterne und den Duft der geheimnisvollen Inseln auch nur bemerkt zu haben. Das sind die Aufenthalte des Künstlers unter den Menschen, wenn er taumelnd und mit blöden Augen aus dem feurigen Bauch seiner Arbeit hervorkriecht.³⁰⁷

What in Hofmannsthal may be an analogy of the inner world of the artist, Kafka shows throughout his work that this “eigene Welt” of the artist is the same world that has changed so radically and created the same problems for the modern subject that includes worker, bureaucrat, and author alike.

Chapter 4

“Meine zwei Hände begannen einen Kampf”: Kafka’s Meditation on Work, Responsibility, Violence and Writing during World War I

“Meine zwei Hände begannen einen Kampf” — thus begins a short text in Kafka’s notebooks from April 1917.³⁰⁸ Even in this nonchalant opening, it is evident that the narrating subject’s identity is under serious attack, which is carefully elaborated in the violent battle description that follows. In numerous desk scenes in *Der Proceß*, hands function as the novel’s arguably most important trope; they take on the role of main actor and condense K.’s struggles and the trial plot. In “Meine zwei Hände,” by contrast, the hands are the actual protagonists, and the fight, trial, and the near-execution take place entirely on the desk.

In this text, Kafka uses the trope of the hand to describe an amalgamation of white-collar responsibility and blue-collar dangers, as well as issues of authorship in a prose piece whose main theme is violent struggle. In this chapter, I argue that the text is not only an inventory of the work problematics that are so central for Kafka, but also is directly linked to the ongoing World War — a theme that had professional as well as personal implications for Kafka and that in many ways was a more extreme continuation of the same irreconcilable views on the modern human subject that Kafka encountered in his accident insurance work. “Meine zwei Hände”

is an inventory of the violence, threats and attacks on the subject, rendering the struggle at the same time more extreme and more personal.

In the following chapter I will show first that “Meine zwei Hände” condenses and intensifies the issues I have treated in the previous three chapters: It not only contains a social critique and powerful imagery associated with industrial work and manual labor, but also features the struggles of the individual at his desk, including responsibility for social circumstances and regulation. These struggles are layered with the narrator’s struggle for agency and control over his own narrative and thus writing and authorship.

Furthermore, the fusion of white- and blue-collar work issues, the violent struggle, and the existential threat to the subject sitting at the desk, combined with the theme of responsibility and even guilt, can be interpreted in the context of World War One. Not only can the text be read in relation to the contemporary war discourses in the Prague media, as I will show in part 2, but for Kafka, the war context is a logical continuation of the work context, because of his war-related responsibilities at the insurance institute, the theme of part 3. It is especially his sudden and tragic expertise with amputations and prosthetics, which proliferated during the war years, that emerges in the most extreme and powerful passages of “Meine zwei Hände.” While “Meine zwei Hände” does not open up direct access to Kafka’s thinking about the war and about war-related injuries, a metaphorical relationship between the text and the context of the war can be surmised, especially given that it was written in the same creative period as a number of other texts that

contain more direct allusions to the war. In addition, I will include Kafka's direct mentions of the war in diary entries and letters to complement the interpretation of "Meine zwei Hände."

A careful analysis of this text is warranted for several reasons. Because the text features an entire storyline that focuses exclusively on hands, and because of the themes that it treats, it is of course central for my argument that the hand is Kafka's primary trope to negotiate the challenges of the modern subject in relation to its individual agency, its place in a collective, and the threats that it faces. But it is also an important text in its own right, which has received surprisingly little attention, even though it is a complex and rich miniature narrative, and with its carefully choreographed beginning, middle and end, stands out as a finished story among the many shorter, unfinished fragments in the posthumously published works. Yet, to my knowledge, despite the fact that the text negotiates issues of central significance for Kafka's work, no analysis of this text exists.³⁰⁹

Moreover, my chapter treats the theme of the war, which is still a surprisingly under-researched area in Kafka scholarship, and which has focused on only a rather small corpus of texts that to my knowledge does not include "Meine zwei Hände," even though it was written in 1917, in proximity to the few other texts that have received scholarly attention as war-themed.³¹⁰ Finally, the text is also extremely significant from a philological standpoint, because it was written amidst versions of "Bericht für eine Akademie" and serves as a laboratory for finding the narrative voice and genre for the ape author Rotpeter's report, which I will explore

in my conclusion to this dissertation.

1. The amalgamation and intensification of private and public crises, authorship and social intervention

“Meine zwei Hände” features a literal crisis of the subject that is torn between being an individual and a collective of seemingly independent agents, a crisis of agency because the narrator is torn between passive observation and active involvement, and a crisis in which boundaries between the public and the private are dissolved, since the personal struggle is also a very public struggle on a desk that changes from a stage into an arena and finally a battlefield. The text can be read as a reflection of how the individual subject is affected by a worldview where the individual body is part of a social system that is so much linked to this identity that it is internalized. This text thus continues to prove that for Kafka, the hand is both the most personal trope as well as the one that shows the threats of de-individualization and depersonalization, further cementing the hand as the quintessential trope for the problems with which the modern human subject is confronted.

Since this first part of my chapter consists in a close reading of this relatively

short and lesser known text, and the subsequent sections will build on it, I am quoting it here in full:

Meine zwei Hände begannen einen Kampf. Das Buch in dem ich gelesen hatte, klappten sie zu und schoben es bei Seite, damit es nicht störe. Mir salutierten sie und ernannten mich zum Schiedsrichter. Und schon hatten sie die Finger ineinander verschränkt und schon jagten sie am Tischrand hin, bald nach rechts bald nach links je nach dem Überdruck der einen oder der andern. Ich ließ keinen Blick von ihnen. Sind es meine Hände, muß ich ein gerechter Richter sein, sonst halse ich mir selbst die Leiden eines falschen Schiedsspruchs auf. Aber mein Amt ist nicht leicht, im Dunkel zwischen den Handtellern werden verschiedene Kniffe angewendet, die ich nicht unbeachtet lassen darf, ich drücke deshalb das Kinn an den Tisch und nun entgeht mir nichts. Mein Leben lang habe ich die Rechte, ohne es gegen die Linke böse zu meinen, bevorzugt. Hätte doch die Linke einmal etwas gesagt, ich hätte, nachgiebig und rechtlich wie ich bin, gleich den Mißbrauch eingestellt. Aber sie muckte nicht, hing an mir hinunter und während etwa die Rechte auf der Gasse meinen Hut schwang, tastete die Linke ängstlich meinen Schenkel ab. Das war eine schlechte Vorbereitung zum Kampf, der jetzt vor sich geht. Wie willst Du auf die Dauer, linkes Handgelenk, gegen diese gewaltige Rechte Dich stemmen? Wie Deine mädchenhaften Finger in der Klemme der fünf andern behaupten? Das scheint mir kein Kampf mehr, sondern natürliches Ende der Linken. Schon ist sie in die äußerste linke Ecke des Tisches gedrängt, und an ihr regelmäßig auf und nieder schwingend wie ein Maschinenkolben die Rechte. Bekäme ich angesichts dieser Not nicht den erlösenden Gedanken, daß es meine eigenen Hände sind, die hier im Kampf stehn und daß ich sie mit einem leichten Ruck von einander wegziehen kann und damit Kampf und Not beenden -- bekäme ich diesen Gedanken nicht, die Linke wäre aus dem Gelenk gebrochen vom Tisch geschleudert und dann vielleicht die Rechte in der Zügellosigkeit des Siegers wie der fünfköpfige Höllenhund mir selbst ins aufmerksame Gesicht gefahren. Statt dessen liegen die zwei jetzt übereinander, die Rechte streichelt den Rücken der Linken, und ich unehrlicher Schiedsrichter nicke dazu.³¹¹

The struggle as crisis of the subject and subjectivity

Initially, the struggle is described as a personal crisis. The text begins in a neutral,

informative, matter of fact tone: The first-person speaker, who is sitting at his desk and has been reading up to this point, simply informs us that his hands are beginning a fight against one another. The commonplace, almost generic character of the introductory sentence does not emphasize the unusual nature of the event; on the contrary — the speaker seems to be narrating the event in an entirely unaffected manner, and from an outsider's perspective. However, the calm tone in which he describes the gaze onto his own fighting hands stands in odd contrast with the struggle for control, power, and agency that is taking place, thus indicating that there is a strong disturbance and that the narrative perspective is challenged right from the outset. In the second sentence it becomes clear that the speaker is adversely affected by the action, and that he is in limited control of the situation, his own body, and subsequently, plot and narration. The confused identity of the narrator is mirrored in the narrative perspective where positions are constantly shifting, from the structural composition of the mini-plot and up to syntactical and even grammatical details. There is no uniformity of the speaking subject's insight and perspective, just as there is no unity of its body.

The struggle takes place on several levels and between several parties. The first sentence lays out how the two hands are displaying a struggle for authority over each other, a conflict that is also a struggle between the positions of subject and object. The hands subsequently switch back and forth between the roles of the attacker and the attacked, the hunter and the hunted, "je nach dem Überdruck der einen oder der andern"; likewise, they switch from the attacking to the receiving, active to passive functions. The hands are not confined to clear roles of object and

subject, but the struggle rather takes place between these roles themselves. The very positions of object and subject are challenged, not only because the hands themselves oscillate between the roles but also because the speaker is alienated from his hands.

This more complex conflict between object and subject regarding the speaker versus his hands is inherent in the first sentence as well, and is continued more explicitly in the second sentence, when the speaker refers to his own self and his hands as two different entities with differing goals, “ich” versus “sie”; they begin the fight and it is experienced as a loss of control over his own body. The grammatical structure of the sentence reflects this fact: the subject of the sentence are the hands, and the direct object is the speaker’s book. Only when defining “Das Buch in dem ich gelesen hatte” in the relative clause, is the speaker represented as a subject of his action; he does so however in the past perfect tense, making clear that his autonomous choice of activity has come to a halt. He does not experience the situation as himself being the subject that is moving the book to the side with his own hands and this lack of agency is emphasized by not using the conventional phrasing that one might expect. In this sense, the unspecified “Kampf” of the first sentence must be read both as a fight between the left hand and the right hand, as well as an act of subversion of the hands against the first-person speaker.

Together with his sense of subject identity, the agency of the narrator is presented as severely challenged, even threatened by the hands. But the participation of the narrator in the battle is crucial nevertheless, and the power

dynamics between the hands and the speaker are negotiated throughout the text. While the hands, by moving independently, challenge and subvert the narrator's authority, even when describing the helpless situation, the narrator's gaze on the hands still holds a certain amount of objectifying power. These dynamics of a change between positions of object and subject of the narrative perspective and control of the body are further developed in the subsequent plot, including in the actions of the hand-protagonists: "Mir salutierten sie" is a performance of the reverence and respect towards a person ranked higher in a military hierarchy, and the word "Schiedsrichter" implies the speaker's jurisdiction over his hands. Yet, the hand's capability to appoint the speaker ("ernannten mich") to the position of "Schiedsrichter" brings the authority back to the hands and makes the speaker the grammatical object of the decision. This oscillating sense of agency and authority mirrors the speaker's overall situation as active and passive, almost hyperactively moving his hands, and at the same time unable to consciously move them, having to watch in the role of the uninvolved observer. The importance of the designated position of being the referee, or arbiter, is underlined by the speaker's intention to be "ein gerechter Richter", or describing his character as "rechtlich", and beginning and ending the entire account by referring to his position as "Schiedsrichter". The notion of "Schiedsrichter" also contains a tension in the self's perceived agency over his own hands, as an arbiter on the one hand is ideally neutral, uninvolved and objective towards the conflicting entities, and at the same time holds decisive authority over them. So the agency over the use of his hands remains highly ambiguous, depending on the point of view, just as the perspective changes with

each sentence, dependent clause, or as in the case of “Schiedsrichter”, individual words. (Moreover, the meaning of “Schiedsrichter” contains through the etymology of “scheiden” the concept of division and separation, both applying to the fighting hands, and at a deeper level underlining the notion of the unnaturally separated body parts, the divided sense of self, and emphasizing the absurdity of needing an arbiter within one body, normally one physical unit.)

The struggle for control affects the very consciousness of the observing and speaking instances. The speaker is shown to go back and forth between the awareness that these are his own hands, and an outside perspective. The conditional clause—“Sind es meine Hände, muß ich ein gerechter Richter sein”—grasps that uncertain position: it acknowledges the potential of the hands not being his own; at the same time, the potential of harming himself through an unfair judgment is contained in the self-reflective phrasing and bodily metaphor “sonst halse ich mir selbst die Leiden eines falschen Schiedspruchs auf”. Even though the speaker doesn’t notice that the physical consequences of the fight are affecting him directly because it is his own body, he is aware of its indirect but physical effect. As for K. in *Der Proceß*, psychological injury is layered with physical injury, and there are physical consequences to the “trial” or arbitration on the table. Here however, the same person embodies judge and opposing parties through different parts of the body and mind, reflecting an extreme alienation between mind and body and more generally, creating an objectifying view of the body where the hands are isolated. The allegedly independent action of his hands threaten the speaker as a subject; but his own participation in the battle between the hands also contains a certain

threatening potential, which consists in his own responsibility.

The responsibility of the arbitrator

As judge and arbiter, the narrator is forced into a mediating position. In addition to the meaning of referee or umpire, “Schiedsrichter” has a legal meaning and the fact that the speaker explicitly calls himself “Richter” underlines this dimension. The legal terminology recalls not only works such as “Das Urteil” or *Der Proceß*, but also of course Kafka’s own profession (about which “mein Amt ist nicht leicht” is an equally suitable statement). In fact, the AUVA made use of arbitration courts (“Schiedsgerichte”). There were for instance discussions about whether a suing worker should have a lawyer to represent him before a “Schiedsgericht”, and the AUVA argued against it: “das soziale Schiedsgericht [sei] seiner eigenen Mission nach ein Organ der Fürsorge, so daß formelle Advokaten die ohnehin am Wohl der Kläger orientierten Verhandlungen nur beeinträchtigten.”³¹² In making the narrator the legal representative of the hands’ fate, “Meine zwei Hände” also contains a reflection on the very principles of legal and social representation (even though the “judge” turns out to be unreliable, as I will show).

Moreover, the text can specifically be read as an illustration of Kafka’s position at the AUVA where he dealt with the worker’s body and where he was forced to view it from an impersonal, objectifying point of view rather than seeing it as an individual unit (even in texts that can be considered as socially engaged, such

as the one analyzed in Chapter 2). “Meine zwei Hände” illustrates how the subject is literally torn between the health of the individual and the health of the organism. The narrator’s body mirrors in this respect the insured body that is viewed not under the premise of an individual’s physical integrity but rather from an impersonal point of view. At the same time, the narrator, in his disturbed subjectivity, also illustrates the white collar employee, working in the administration of the social organism and being deeply affected by it; to a certain extent, being an arbiter means being an accomplice to the system, but also its victim. As in the case of Josef K., the pervasiveness of the view of the human body from an impersonal point of view of the legal-economic system also affects his own body, and the threat is embodied here by a single person sitting at his desk. Like the diary entry about the “Zauberhand” discussed in chapter 2, the administrator’s very own hand on the desk is threatened here with the imagery of a machine attacking the hand (“an ihr regelmäßig auf und nieder schwingend wie ein Maschinenkolben die Rechte”).³¹³ The events on the table are increasingly representations of conflicts that go beyond the private and personal, and the narrator demonstrates the impossibility of separating his own agency, and authorship, from its social implications.

The hand threatened by the “Maschinenkolben” is another direct allusion to Kafka’s own expertise in hand injuries and brings to mind the drawings from the accident prevention text (also discussed in chapter 2), as well as the hand versus machine antagonism that he uses as a rhetorical strategy in the accident prevention text. There, too, the hand and machine parts become representatives of the larger

societal conflicts between which the AUVA and Kafka have to mediate. Even though it is a hand on the desk that is in danger here, the threatened blue collar hand imagery shows that the different dimensions are inherently linked; “Meine zwei Hände” combines the threats to the subject that the white collar employee at his desk faces with the threats of the blue collar worker described in the accident prevention texts or *Der Verschollene*, while simultaneously focusing on the tension between them.

The depiction of the hand that is threatened by a machine (or, rather, another hand that is likened to a machine) makes the social commentary most explicit by making it part of the personal crisis of the subject at his desk. By showing the hands as separate from the subject’s mind, it also performs a literalization of a split between hands and head/mind. Therefore, the text can be read as a reflection between the very division of labor and its effect on the body. One is reminded of Marx and Engel’s critique of the separation between “head” and “hand” labor in *Das Kapital*:

Soweit der Arbeitsprozeß ein rein individueller, vereinigt derselbe Arbeiter alle Funktionen, die sich später trennen. In der individuellen Aneignung von Naturgegenständen zu seinen Lebenszwecken kontrolliert er sich selbst. Später wird er kontrolliert. Der einzelne Mensch kann nicht auf die Natur wirken ohne Betätigung seiner eignen Muskeln unter Kontrolle seines eignen Hirns. Wie im Natursystem Kopf und Hand zusammengehören, vereint der Arbeitsprozeß Kopfarbeit und Handarbeit. Später scheiden sie sich bis zum feindlichen Gegensatz.³¹⁴

“Meine zwei Hände” thus also illustrates not only the estranged nature of manual labor and the dangers of industrial work but also of the desk worker who in this

division of labor has not only lost the consciousness that he is identical with his hands, but also any sense of control over his hands. The text therefore depicts the alienated nature of both industrial production and intellectual work. This recalls the passages from *Der Proceß* (and *Das Schloß*) quoted in the last chapter, where the head worker appears as both completely estranged from, and at the same time fascinated by, manual labor and tries to compensate for the lack of the latter through craft projects like that of the deputy director on K.'s desk. In "Meine zwei Hände," though, the "feindliche Gegensatz" is particularly apparent and literally staged as an antagonism between not only two hands, but between head and hands. Their separation consists in a partial loss of consciousness, proprioception and identity.

Objectivity and shifting loyalties and allegiances

The narrator is therefore only partially aware of his own involvement and responsibility. He is aware of the fact that his perspective counts, and he is aware that his "neutral," objective position, which of course is a temporary fallacy, requires a neutral point of observation from which he gets a complete picture. He therefore adjust his physical point of view by lowering his head and placing his chin on the table: "Aber mein Amt ist nicht leicht, im Dunkel zwischen den Handtellern werden verschiedene Kniffe angewendet, die ich nicht unbeachtet lassen darf, ich drücke deshalb das Kinn an den Tisch und nun entgeht mir nichts." After the change of visual perspective, the narrator begins to perceive an inherent lack of equality. The hands are perceived not only as separate from him, but also as separate from each

other, and they are assigned their own identities. Up to the speaker's reflection about the difference between the hands, the fighting hands appear as a unit, and the fight seems equal, and rather for sports than a question of life and death. As soon as the speaker gets closer to the hands, and acknowledges involvement beyond that of "Schiedsrichter", the fight leaves the realm of the playful and becomes existentially threatening for his left hand and then for the speaker himself.

Despite the speaker's attempt to find a neutral position, he shifts back and forth between displaying responsibility, even guilt as well as justifications (which is a parallel to the structure of the accident prevention text, too). While the closer perspective leads the speaker to address his own responsibility, he also attempts to distance himself as the "neutral" observer. With the chin on the table, and thus at the hands' level, he looks at the events on the table not as "owner" of the hands, but as observer. The admission of having privileged the right hand seems to let the speaker assume some responsibility, but the interjection "ohne es [...] böse zu meinen" modifies the intentionality and agency somewhat, and it is given back entirely to the neglected hand right away - "Hätte doch die Linke einmal etwas gesagt" - before partly acknowledging the "abuse" again: "ich hätte, nachgiebig und rechtlich, wie ich bin, gleich den Mißbrauch eingestellt" - of course not without shifting it back to the hand by attacking its passivity and weakness as its own fault: "Aber sie muckste nicht, hing an mir herunter, und während die Rechte auf der Gasse meinen Hut schwang, tastete die Linke ängstlich meinen Schenkel ab." Not only does this self-inflicted lack of training ("schlechte Vorbereitung zum Kampf") alleviate him of his responsibility, but contrasting the 'personality' of the left and the right hands also

shifts the attention back to the struggle between them which is then taking place independently and without him being an agent. This allows him to address the left hand directly, from a purely observing perspective: “Wie willst Du auf die Dauer, linkes Handgelenk, gegen diese gewaltige Rechte Dich stemmen? Wie Deine mädchenhaften Finger in der Klemme der fünf andern behaupten?” Both the apostrophe and the phrasing as a question create distance by suggesting the non-involvement of the speaker, who at this moment seems to experience a sympathetic bystander’s interest in the fight rather than being personally involved. This alleged neutrality serves to downplay the narrator’s own responsibility as much as it is an expression of his impaired state.

The internalized social struggle

Rather than an objective observer, “Meine zwei Hände” presents a subject who has internalized the social conditions and the roles of the participants. Increasingly, the personal struggle features elements of a social struggle. The two fighting hands are assigned background narratives of their own, including their socialization and their environment that are responsible for their performance in the struggle. The description reflects social conventions and cultural norms, and both hands’ identities are shaped by those norms. When the speaker mentions the different kinds of training the hands have had, he attributes the differences in their strength and stamina to environmental factors, upbringing, etc. The hands become agents of a collective in which they have their own assigned social status and respective role

to play. The left hand gets assigned the role of the subaltern, suppressed entity, and the right hand has the dominant, proactive role. The right hand excels at social interactions, and is part of a well-mastered system of manners and social conventions. When the speaker refers to a better preparation for the fight consisting in the gesture with which “die Rechte auf der Gasse meinen Hut schwang”, it is significant that the hand is used for communication, for the purpose of salutation and interaction with another person. This also lets us conclude that the right hand has good interaction and coordination with the speaker’s person.

The capability to communicate is emphasized by the location at which this greeting takes place — “auf der Gasse” shows an outside scene, and suggests sociability. This stands in contrast to the position of the left hand, described as passive and weak; “sie . . . hing an mir hinunter und während etwa die Rechte auf der Gasse meinen Hut schwang, tastete die Linke ängstlich meinen Schenkel ab.” While the right hand is raised and suggests flexed muscles, the left is shown as limp, and the notion of hanging (in its intransitive usage) indicates a further lack of movement, direction and agency. “Schwingen” and “tasten” reflects two hand functions, the kinetic one of applying force, and the tactile one of perception. Here, the ambivalence inherent in the human hand is split between the active right hand and the passive left hand. When the left is addressed directly, the emphasis is on the difference in strength: Wie willst Du auf die Dauer, linkes Handgelenk, gegen diese gewaltige Rechte Dich stemmen? The left hand’s physical inferiority in terms of kinetic performance becomes gendered by referring to the “mädchenhaften Finger in der Klemme der fünf andern.” The hands as individual body parts cannot escape

their own social “realities”. As one of the permutations of violence and attacks on the subject in the text, and as one facet of the embodied social struggle, the image of the left hand directly attacked by the machine piston is displayed, assigning to the left hand the position of the disenfranchised factory worker. The right hand also shows traits of (literal) objectification, but as opponent of the left hand, one could also project onto the right hand the image of a hat-tipping, “bourgeois,” industrial hand, an embodiment of this oppression and power inequality.

The depiction of hands as products of cultural and social norms includes the mastery, or absence, of language. The speaker’s reproaches begin with a failure of the left hand to speak and the subjunctive mode alludes to the potential of an alternative outcome: “Hätte doch die Linke einmal etwas gesagt”. The left hand stays silent, while the right hand communicates, using signs with cultural and social significance such as the greeting gesture. Language as ally of the right hand extends to the hands’ names: Instead of the ‘sinister’, shady and clumsy dimensions attributed to the left, the right is privileged by the convention of speech as well. Language and law are plotting against the left hand through the alliance of the semantic field “recht”, “rechts”, “rechtlich”, “Richter”, “gerecht” etc., which is for instance explicit in the chiasmic structure of the sentence: “Hätte doch die *Linke* einmal etwas gesagt, ich hätte, nachgiebig und *rechtlich* wie ich bin, gleich den Mißbrauch eingestellt.”³¹⁵ Speech is introduced both as potential equalizer, and at the same time it illustrates a certain futility in achieving social equality since language reflects this inequality. Moreover, for a majority of people, including Kafka, the dominant right hand is of course also the writing hand, and the movement of

“schwingen” that is attributed here to the right hand, is closely associated with the momentum of successful writing, or, generally, agency, as I have shown in the previous chapter. The social, gendered and linguistic domination of the right hand over the left are all displayed in the spectacle on the desk.

The internalized social struggle shows that the political and the personal, the public and the private are inseparable, and the boundaries of the subject permeable. There is no innocent or safe position, and the hand of the subject at his desk is threatened by the same forces that attack him and his physical and psychological integrity from the inside. The figure of the hand is simultaneously a metonymy for the challenged view of the subject and the effect on the individual body, as well as for different roles and functions within the struggles that affect the narrator who combines them within his attacked and confused person.

Similar to *Der Proceß*, the text layers political and aesthetical dimensions. Especially the beginning emphasizes certain dramatic elements: First, a miniature theatre on the desk, which morphs into the spectacle of a competitive fighting match for entertainment, such as a sporting event, or a gladiator-inspired play. From the beginning, the speaker is a spectator in addition to his role as “Schiedsrichter”. The tone of the sentence, “Schon ist sie in die äußerste linke Ecke des Tisches gedrängt, und an ihr regelmäßig auf und nieder schwingend wie ein Maschinenkolben die Rechte” brings to mind the sensationalist perspective of an excited observer or commentator of a sports game, resembling a referee’s point of view. In this sense, the close-up on the hands evokes a boxing match, with its visual emphasis on the

disproportionately enlarged hands and their quasi-metonymical function.³¹⁶ Within such a playful context, this sentence is in its hyperbolic simile a high point of the fight, increasing suspense, captivating the audience, and anticipating its impending conclusion.

At the same time, the image shifts the action from the playful to the existential threat, underlined by the previous detailed depiction of the left hand as unfit for such a fight. This not only implies a power disparity that would render any fight unfair, but also points to a context that goes beyond the playful altogether by continuing to depict the fight as an illustration of diverging social conditions. As such, the literally suppressed position of the left hand is no longer only an entertainment struggle, but incorporates topoi of a class struggle.

The description of the inequality of the hands and its culmination in the “Maschinenkolben” passage makes it clear that the conflict is more than a playful fight for sport or a theatrical performance. What initially appears as an entertaining spectacle or aesthetic experiment increasingly becomes overshadowed by the description of social realities of the hands and the threat to the hand that recalls an industrial accident and eventually even becomes a threat of amputation, and in the end an invocation of death. An early indication is the fact that the hands get rid of a book, a representative of the realm of the aesthetic, so that the fight is not impeded. The spectacle is ultimately interrupted because the spectator is forced to intervene. It is this scene of the right hand attacking the left hand in the image of the machine piston that triggers the necessity for intervention and the speaker’s thought that he

can in fact control his hands.

Narrative and social intervention

The ending and resolution of the conflict is presented here as a struggle over the control of the narrative (and likewise authorship of the body), but also as a social intervention. The ending illustrates the inseparable link between the private, personal control over the body and the public, political gesture.

It is only because of the urgency of the situation that it occurs to the speaker “daß es meine eigenen Hände sind, die hier im Kampf stehn und daß ich sie mit einem leichten Ruck von einander wegziehn kann und damit Kampf und Not beenden”. However, the sentence is introduced by a conditional clause in the subjunctive mode, and followed by the repetition of that clause (“bekäme ich diesen Gedanken nicht”), so that the consciousness that these are his own hands is still not presented in a clear straightforward way, but as subordinate clause to a hypothetical ending: “die Linke wäre aus dem Gelenk gebrochen vom Tisch geschleudert und dann vielleicht die Rechte in der Zügellosigkeit des Siegers wie der fünfköpfige Höllenhund mir selbst ins aufmerksame Gesicht gefahren.” The potential ending is replaced by an ‘actual’ one, but the order and intensity of the presentation stresses the prominence of the hypothetical ending, and the narrator emphasizes the final ending’s nature of substitution: “Statt dessen liegen die zwei jetzt übereinander, die Rechte streichelt den Rücken der Linken, und ich unehrlicher

Schiedsrichter nicke dazu." There is an emphasis on how the struggle will end throughout the text. The very fact that a referee, or arbitrator, is appointed suggests that the outcome will be relevant, and potentially controversial. Several times, endings are mentioned: the "natural ending" of the left hand ("natürliches Ende der Linken") is anticipated, before the speaker decides to intervene; this ending is further explored in the hypothetical sentence, before the "real" ending is presented as substitute.

There is a contrast between the hypothetical, catastrophic ending and the more moderate, happy ending; the alternate endings evoke different "genres" or tones of the narrative. The "tragic" version ends with the fight indeed turning out to be a fight over life and death, with the "killing" of the left hand, by throwing it outside of the arena, off the stage, and separating it from the rest of the body. The winner is not a surprise given that the speaker had prophesied the "natürliches Ende der Linken", but the serious turn from what began like an athletic game or play creates a shocking effect even in the conditional mode, with the amputation of the left hand and the primordial, mythological threat of the five-headed "Höllenhund" who leaves the confines of the table, arena, and stage by attacking the "Gesicht" of the speaker and observer/viewer, and possibly threatening his very capability of vision, even his life (through the hand injury). Though hypothetical, the structure of a show trial and then execution recalls the plot of *Der Proceß*, with the difference that here, trial, struggle and execution literally take place on the desk.³¹⁷ The lighter, G rated or "comedic" version, on the other hand, ends with the restoration of the social order. It is made clear that this means sacrificing honesty, and authenticity, in

favor of social conventions and gestures, illustrated by the hypocritical act of the right hand caressing the left hand, and the speaker's nodding his head and referring to himself as "unehrlicher Schiedsrichter". The happy ending is achieved by submission under the restraints that come with being part of a community, or one organism.

The neutral beginning thus explicitly becomes charged with tragic potential before ending on a note that is not as conciliatory as it is critical; the violent alternative is still present in the gesture of the right hand caressing the left and so is the speaker's own conformism, in both narrative containment and adherence to social norms. Specifically, the "happy" ending is tainted by the attribute "unehrlich." This could refer to the speaker's alleged neutrality and the actual loyalties that he has displayed throughout. In fact, the speaker has turned out to be an unreliable ally: he admits having favored the right hand, then feels guilt towards the left, then blames the left for it. Finally, he seems to experience some empathy for the left hand, emphasizes the violence of the right hand, and intervenes on behalf of the left hand. Moreover, as a "Schiedsrichter", he is not allowed to intervene as actively as he does in the end. Impartial by definition, the critical intervention is against the ethos of the position. Therefore, the end comes with a certain sacrifice of the true, "realistic" depiction of the conflict. He even seems to express guilt towards the rightful winner, the false state of peace, the fact that the game is rigged, and his own hypocrisy. The image of his nodding his head affirmatively as he is showcasing the peaceful solution of the right hand caressing the left hand is a literal rendering of the proverb "Gute Miene zum bösen Spiel machen".

Another way that the ending is dishonest is the motivation for intervening: Even though it is not clear whether the speaker ever realizes it, his intervention turns out to be for his own benefit, for ending the fight that threatens his own body, and for being able to conclude the story with a rather happy ending/regain authorship. The empathy with the left hand is essentially exposed as an act of self-preservation. He wants to protect his own physical integrity as well as the narrative integrity, with an ending that fits the beginning of the tale of the fight.

The fact that by intervening, the speaker not only tries to protect the hand that is under attack, but his body, or organism as a whole, could also contain a criticism of social intervention through the state that, in addition to protecting those that are vulnerable, has of course primarily its own economic and political health in mind, as discussed in chapter 2. "Unehrllich" could thus also be a commentary on a certain inherent selfishness of the act of the "social" intervention. The depiction of an intervention that is both hypocritical and at the same time necessary to prevent other outcomes can be read as a commentary on Kafka's own position within social accident insurance and the limitations that I have shown to be present in his own accident prevention text. The ending can thus be seen as an illustration of the problematic position of the desk worker who is involved in the administration of the individual human body and social organism. It shows the intervention of social insurance that regulates social challenges and at the same time it shows the limits of such intervention. Similar to the accident prevention text, the ending is depicted as a compromise. In the accident prevention text, the peaceful compromise of the safer device, the cylindrical shaft, is contrasted with the lasting impression of the images

that show a darker dimension of the situation of the individual subject within the social organism, and in this sense, there are alternate endings at work as well.

The hypocrisy therefore extends to the fact that it is the narrative rendering of a state that he himself knows to be more violent and deeper a conflict than he makes it appear in the end. The synthesis as such is a fake compromise, and the logical and true continuation would have led to more destruction. Social stability comes with a price, and the price paid is truth. This points to a difficult connection between struggle and conflict, versus authenticity, truth, and honesty in writing. The text thus combines writing experiments with social reflections. The combination of writing reflections and contemporary political and social critique also includes reflections on another historical context that influences Kafka's writing in 1917, the ongoing war, especially after the particularly cruel winter of 1916/1917.

2. "Meine zwei Hände" and the contemporary war discourses in the multiethnic city of Prague

"Meine zwei Hände" is first and foremost the depiction of a battle. The military allusions such as "salutieren" and the staging of the conflict as "Kampf" underline the connections of the text to the war. These consist, as I show in the following, in allusions to contemporary war discourses, especially in the Prague press. The text can be read in light of the daily reports on the war and it includes reflections on the issues of the challenges of war reporting, neutrality, censorship, and varying

loyalties, which I will demonstrate in this part before suggesting in my third part how the contexts of part 1 and 2 must be read together.

“Meine zwei Hände” as war report and the issue of censorship

“Meine zwei Hände,” as I’ve shown, can be read as a reflection on writing, and specifically a reflection on writing about tension, conflict, and violence. As such, the text consciously plays with war discourses. Wolf Kittler has discovered the influence of Bernd Kellermann’s “Der Krieg unter der Erde” from 1915 on Kafka’s late text “Der Bau,” written in Berlin in 1923 and 1924.³¹⁸ “Meine zwei Hände” mimics war reports as well, perhaps even more directly, since an actual battle provides the theme of the description. News reporting from the front was faced with considerable challenges, since it was difficult to find neutral information, to select what information to report, and how to interpret it;³¹⁹ an inherent problem was the difficulty of gaining direct access to the battlefield. Especially the passage in “Meine zwei Hände” where the reader, in order to get a perspective that allows him to experience the battle more directly, puts his chin on the table, can be seen as an allusion to this difficult or nearly impossible requirement for an objective and direct perspective.³²⁰

“Meine zwei Hände” may perhaps even raise the issue of the unreliability of the battle report. With its layering of endings, the text shows that the final image of the right hand caressing the left does not represent the complete, or “honest”

picture: The narrative intervention at the end almost appears to be a cover-up, and the narrator's assessment of the ending as "unehrlich" confirms this. The ending therefore may allude to censorship, though of course no direct connection is made. Censorship by 1917 had become a normal occurrence, and the telltale layout of a newspaper article with white passages deleted by the censor had become an everyday sight, omnipresent in newspapers and journals.³²¹ By the end of 1914, 46 journals had been banned in Prague.³²² Anything written about the battles was potentially unreliable, due to censorship or conflicts of interest. Censorship was present from the beginning of the war in the Austrian empire, enforced by the surveillance of the "Kriegsüberwachungsamt" in Austria and the "Kriegsüberwachungskommission" in Hungary.³²³ The interventions were not limited to censorship, but the state and military were taking active influence. Beginning in December 1915, daily press conferences were held in the "Kriegsüberwachungsamt" in Vienna, where a small selection of "reliable" reporters received information.³²⁴

Kafka had experienced the threat of war censorship firsthand. He wrote to Felice about a public reading of *Strafkolonie* in Munich in 1916 and his fears of whether it would be allowed.³²⁵ For the reading, permission "from the Bavarian military censors was needed, and granted, for the only public reading of the story . . . under the camouflaged title 'Tropische Münchhausiade.'" ³²⁶ Kafka's correspondence with Felice Bauer, too, was affected by the military censorship of personal letters.³²⁷ The war was perceived as a war of information, and the "censored", dishonest ending of "Meine zwei Hände" could also be seen as a decision to intervene into the

narrative that is a critique of editing or censoring the violent events, though this remains speculative.

Loyalties and tensions

Throughout, “Meine zwei Hände” emphasizes the themes of loyalty, objectivity, neutrality, and varying alliances of the narrator with the two hands. These issues of loyalty were part of the daily conversations in the press as well, and therefore it seems that just as with the issue of the challenges of war reports, “Meine zwei Hände,” whose narrator constantly justifies his actions and loyalties to the left and right hand, takes up the topic of loyalty and the allegations and accusations of disloyalty that had been part of the public discussion since the beginning of the war and had become increasingly heated. In Prague, the question of loyalty was a very charged one, because of the multiethnic makeup of the population consisting of Germans, German-speaking Jews, and the Czech population. The loyalties of the different groups to the Habsburg empire were questioned throughout the war,³²⁸ especially for the Jewish and Czech populations. The Czech population’s loyalties were questioned in regard to secret allegiances towards Russia. Mark Cornwall writes that the “slow Czech/German polarization in the war years has mounting implications for anyone who fitted uneasily into a national category; this included Kafka.”³²⁹ German-Czech antagonisms also affected the AUVA where Kafka found himself amidst the “Wüten des deutsch-tcheschischen Sprachenkampfes.”³³⁰

Jewish loyalties were questioned from the beginning, and the issue became increasingly adversarial. A key event of wartime anti-Semitism by the German military was the “Juden­zählung” in 1916, the counting of Jews serving in the military.³³¹ Claire Nolte points out that “anti-Semitism was on the rise in the Czech community of Prague, fueled by resentment of the large number of Jewish refugees who had been driven from their homes in Galicia by the Russian army.”³³² Cornwall describes how “Jewish outsiders could appear suspect to the increasingly vociferous German or Czech nationalists whose rhetoric was starting to dominate the public discourse in Prague and the localities. The long Habsburg war against an external enemy was increasingly turning inwards, converted into a struggle on the home front against real and imaginary domestic foes.”³³³ With its strong emphasis on loyalty, and the display of varying and changing allegiances, “Meine zwei Hände” could be read as such an internalization of both the outside and inside struggles during the war. The individual is literally being torn apart, and the disturbance within the organism is also an indication of a strong disturbance of being part of a community.³³⁴

“Meine zwei Hände” in relation to the China “war” texts from 1917

Instead of presenting a harmonious whole, and in showing a variety of allegiances, “Meine zwei Hände” features a fragmented narrative voice. In this, the text resembles two other texts Kafka wrote in early 1917 and that are part of the small group of texts that have been linked with World War I, “Beim Bau der chinesischen

Mauer" and "Ein altes Blatt". Cornwall describes that "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer" is "exploring obliquely the problems of social-national cohesion with a remote emperor existing in the background."³³⁵ And indeed, the text features a "Kaiser" and other topical links to the war. But also apart from a thematic connection the text reflects the war in its form, as Benno Wagner argues; he lays out how in the China texts, the "multitudes of voices" produce "an indeterminacy that would aim to counteract the murderous determination implied in the propaganda-based national identities of Kafka's time."³³⁶ Regarding this narrative strategy, Wagner claims that "even at the level of form the aesthetic text is deeply indebted to its cultural context."³³⁷ The play with different, competing, and fragmented perspectives appears in "Meine zwei Hände," too.

The narrator is seemingly demoted to the position of witness or observer, as in other texts of the period; Engel writes about the narrator of *Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer*: "Sein Ich-Erzähler gehört einem für Kafka seit dem Winter 1916/1917 immer wichtiger werdenden Typus an, den man den 'Forscher-Erzähler' nennen könnte. Meist handelt es sich dabei um eine Figur mit nur minimaler raum-zeitlicher Distanz zu ihrem Forschungsgegenstand"³³⁸ Engel however points out the flawed nature of the researcher narrator: "Die Forscherperspektive dagegen mag zwar begrenzt sein, ist jedoch nach besten Kräften und bestem Wissen um die Wahrheit bemüht"³³⁹ While Engel never mentions "Meine zwei Hände," it is exactly such a narrator, or even a critical examination of such a narrator (if a flawed, fragmented one), that is featured in "Meine zwei Hände." The narrator also tries to present the complete picture, and attributes great importance to the "truth" of the

matter up to his involvement in the end; he is concerned with a close and objective perspective (putting the chin on the table) and with researching the situation, including through the thorough “background checks” on each of the hands. The fact that he deems himself a neutral observer, even though the struggle is a highly personal and subjective matter, almost appears as a caricature of a perspective that claims to be neutral.

In addition to these formal similarities there are also thematic connections between the two texts. “Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer” presents a struggle to keep the status quo, and “Ein altes Blatt” deals with the state of exception, the attack through the Nomads and their unleashed violence.³⁴⁰ Both the state of exception as well as the struggle for the “Normalzustand” are negotiated in “Meine zwei Hände” as well. In “Ein altes Blatt”, the image of the impossibility to communicate with the nomads (“die Hände aus den Gelenken winden”)³⁴¹ resembles the image at the end of “Meine zwei Hände.” And even though the text does not describe an inner struggle, but soldiers and the “Verteidigung unseres Vaterlandes” are mentioned explicitly, there is a moment of making the struggle personal and somewhat internalized:³⁴² the speaker’s inability to communicate (including with his hands) consists in the inability to speak the language of the nomads that is “ähnlich wie Dohlen”, (or, in Czech, kavka).³⁴³

The stylistic and thematic relationship with the “China” texts shows that “Meine zwei Hände” was written in a phase where the war was an important theme for Kafka, and where it had influence on the form and content of the writings. As

Engel points out, the manuscript shows that the China texts were written right after Kafka drafted a letter declining participation in a patriotic project for an artists' association for "Greater Austria": "ich bin nämlich nicht imstande, mir ein im Geiste irgendwie einheitliches Groß-Österreich klarzumachen und noch weniger allerdings, mich diesem Geistigen ganz eingefügt zu denken."³⁴⁴ The lack of something "einheitliches" is reflected in the fragmentation of the narrative perspective of the writings from spring 1917, when both the China texts and "Meine zwei Hände" were written, and the latter contains strong disturbances of unity and community.

A battle description as mirror passage

Looking at what precedes and follows a text in the manuscript is also important for "Meine zwei Hände," which is located between different versions of "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie".³⁴⁵ Because so many of Kafka's writing originated in his diaries, the relative position of a text vis-à-vis what follows or precedes can often shed light on what might seem, in isolation, an impossibly hermetic text. The second version breaks off at the point where the ape Rotpeter is caught in a cage on a ship, pressed against the bars that cut into his back, with no way out, right after the narrative voice has changed from a lighter tone to a more serious one. The fragment breaks off with the question Rotpeter asks himself "Wohin willst du?"³⁴⁶ which can be understood as a question how to proceed with the narrative. At this point Kafka writes "Meine zwei Hände", almost as if to explore how to negotiate the topic of the

vulnerable body and the inherent violence of being a member of the human community. "Meine zwei Hände" seems to help find the tone for the final version, which follows immediately, but is again interrupted at the exact parallel cage passage where "Meine zwei Hände" occurs, and with an even more explicit exploration of violence, a passage that is crossed out in the manuscript and in the Fischer critical edition is only found in the commentary (and is thus almost unknown, as well as standing out as strangely atypical for Kafka). This passage is an explicit depiction of a war; as in "Meine zwei Hände," a battle is depicted, but here the first person narrator is a soldier actively participating in the battle as the attacker, bursting with aggression, until he is stopped by an angel-like mythical creature, a negative image of the Höllenhund that stops the attack in "Meine zwei Hände".

[Endlich gelang es unsern Truppen beim Südtor (einzu > in die) Stadt einzubrechen. Meine Abteilung lagerte in einem Vorstadtgarten unter halb verbrannten Kirschbäumen und wartete auf Befehle. Als wir aber den hohen Ton der Trompeten vom Südtor hörten, konnte uns nichts mehr halten. Mit den Waffen die jeder zunächst fasste, ohne Ordnung, den Arm um den Kameraden geschlungen, "Kahira Ka(r > h)ira" unsern Feldruf [singend galoppiertenA] heulend, trabten wir in langen Reihen durch die Sümpfe [die vor der Stadtmauer lag] zur Stadt. Am Südtor fanden wir schon nur Leichen und gelben Rauch, der über dem Boden schwehlte und alles verdeckte. Aber wir wollten wir nicht nur Nachzügler [und] sein und wendeten uns gleich in enge Nebengassen, die bisher vom Kampf verschont geblieben waren. Die erste Haustür zerbarst unter meiner Hacke, so wild drängten wir [uns] in den Flur ein, dass wir uns zuerst umeinanderdrehten. Ein Alter kam uns aus einem langen leeren Gang entgegen. Sonderbarer Alter -- er hatte Flügel. [Lange] Breit ausgespannte Flügel, am Aussenrand höher als er selbst. "Er hat Flügel" rief ich meinen Kameraden zu, und wir [alle] Vordern wichen [einen Schritt] etwas zurück, soweit es die hinten (n > N)achdrängenden erlaubten(, > .) [die mich nicht hören konnten und von nichts wussten.] "Ihr wundert Euch" sagte der Alte "wir alle haben Flügel. | aber sie haben uns nichts genutzt und könnten wir sie uns abreissen, wir täten es." "Warum seid Ihr nicht fortgeflogen" fragte ich. "Aus unserer Stadt hätten wir fortfliegen

sollen? Die Heimat verlassen? Die Toten und die Götter?}]³⁴⁷

This parallel structure also reinforces the function of “Meine zwei Hände” as a text that alludes to the wartime events. The theological motifs can be explained as a conscious allusion to the Zionist literature of the time, which mixes religious imagery with war imagery.³⁴⁸ Kafka was very aware of this literary current, since he read the journals and was acquainted with a group of writers, many of whom participated in the Zionist movement, such as Hugo Bergmann and Martin Buber. The notion of Heimat and the figure of an angel can be seen in this light.³⁴⁹

The reading of “Meine zwei Hände” as a text that takes up war discourses and the reading as a text about responsibility and work issues, as shown in part one, belong together for Kafka, which I will show in the following part by looking at Kafka’s everyday experiences during the war.

3. Kafka’s professional involvement

In addition to the general issues that any person experiencing life at in Prague in 1917 would have experienced, and Kafka’s specific involvement in the literary and journalistic scene, the text can be linked to Kafka’s own professional activity during the war, which can be understood as a more extreme continuation of the work of the

administration of the human body described in chapter 2. This includes especially Kafka's new area of expertise, his work with amputees and prosthetics. Not only was he particularly sensitive to anything hand-related, but, imagery that alludes to amputations and prosthetics is present explicitly in "Meine zwei Hände" in the threat of the amputated left hand, and the transformations from machine piston through "Höllenhund" through which the right hand goes. Finally, the war had a deep impact on Kafka personally, and the fighting hands are deeply connected to the impossibility and possibility of the writing hands.

Kafka's work at the AUVA during the war and the war as escalation of industrial work

The war had a profound impact on the insurance company. Many AUVA employees were at war, and soon the first fatalities were reported - already the report for the year 1914 included an "Ehrentafel" for those who had died "im Kampfe für das Vaterland".³⁵⁰ The remaining employees (who constituted at times as little as half of the original number) had to take on the work of colleagues serving in the war. For Kafka this meant many more work hours and responsibilities; especially since for the AUVA in general, the workload increased dramatically at the same time.³⁵¹ The war was no longer restricted to the battlefields, but took over many aspects of civilian life. Industries in particular were part of the war, participating in the arms race, providing material for the "Materialschlachten" of World War I, while the workforce was affected by deployments and new untrained workers (and,

increasingly, those who came back with severe injuries).

This caused many new problems for the AUVA. For instance, along with workers, many employers of smaller factories were drafted as well and were no longer paying premiums.³⁵² Their proxies were unfamiliar with the processes of accident insurance. And any war-related issues were largely uncharted territory. For instance, if someone had an injury sustained in the war, was he still to be insured when he returned to the workforce if it made the risk for a work accident much higher?³⁵³ Was the AUVA still obligated to pay “Unfallrenten” when the person was at war and it was unsure if he was still alive?³⁵⁴

In the meantime, most of the tasks in Kafka’s area of responsibility, especially in that of accident prevention, came to a halt shortly after the outbreak of World War I. His work in the risk classification of enterprises was also affected. The numerous appeals that had been a big obstacle to the successful installment of accident insurance had ironically become the AUVA’s justification to have Kafka exempted from the military service when his superior Robert Marschner specified how important it was to deal with these appeals as fast as possible and make sure the factories could fulfill their war-supporting tasks.³⁵⁵

In many ways, the war was seen as a more extreme continuation of the work concerning industrial accidents. In a speech held at an anniversary celebration of the Institute, an AUVA board member describes the war-injured veterans as victims of the same technological progress “welcher die Produktivität der menschlichen Arbeit fast ins Unendliche gesteigert, zugleich aber auch in ungeheurem Maße ihre

Gefahren und ihr Risiko erhöht hat.”³⁵⁶ Kafka too made this comparison explicitly; in a public call for donations in 1916 “zur Errichtung und Erhaltung einer Krieger- und Volksnervenheilanstalt in Deutschböhmen in Prag,” he writes:

Der Weltkrieg, der alles menschliche Elend gehäuft in sich enthält, ist auch ein Krieg der Nerven, mehr Krieg der Nerven als je ein früherer Krieg. In diesem Nervenkrieg unterliegen nur allzuviele. So wie im Frieden der letzten Jahrzehnte der intensive Maschinenbetrieb die Nerven der in ihm Beschäftigten unvergleichlich mehr als jemals früher gefährdete, störte und erkranken ließ, hat auch der ungeheuerlich gesteigerte maschinelle Teil der heutigen Kriegshandlungen schwerste Gefahren und Leiden für die Nerven der Kämpfenden verursacht. Und dies in einer Weise, von der sich selbst der Unterrichtete kaum eine zureichende Vorstellung machen kann.³⁵⁷

In a different call for the same cause, likewise from 1916, he compares the “war neuroses” to those induced by industrial and other technology-related accidents: “die Menge der traumatischen Neurosen, die sich für die Arbeiterschaft aus Betriebsunfällen und für die Allgemeinheit besonders im Eisenbahnverkehr ergaben.”³⁵⁸

Helping and attacking hands

Kafka describes the psychological trauma of war very similarly to industrial injuries, including hand tropes: he begins the preceding call for donations with the image of the so called “Kriegszitterer,” „eine sonderbare Schrecken und Mitleid erregende Erscheinung“.³⁵⁹ Veterans with uncontrolled movements were becoming a more and more frequent sight: “arme, bleiche, ausgemergelte Menschen führen Sprünge aus,

als halte sie eine unbarmherzige Hand im Genick, die sie in diesen qualvollen Bewegungen hin- und herreiße.”³⁶⁰ After presenting the individual soldier as controlled by larger forces and describing the psychiatric hospital and what is needed to build it, he puts the possibility almost tangibly in front of the reader’s hands: “Und diese Möglichekeit – das kann ruhig gesagt werden – ist vorhanden, sie bietet sich geradezu an, wartet auf hilfsbereite Hände.”³⁶¹

The hand here is indicative of how the individual’s fate is related to the debt of society towards its members. The image recalls Kafkas attack on fraudulent business owners discussed in chapter 2, and it also recalls the accusatory hand images in the accident prevention text. After describing the soldier who fulfills his patriotic duty at considerable risk, Kafka appeals to potential donors’ “patriotic-social” duties. The individual who takes on risk for the economic health of society should be able to expect in turn the collective that benefits from this sacrifice to return the favor when the risk turns into a reality. While in the case of accident insurance the state takes on this role, Kafka here translates back the role of the state (which he claims in this case has already fulfilled its duty) into the role of society and the goodwill of its healthy and economically fortunate members.

The hand is the trope that connects the fate of the soldier to his community. But it is a highly ambivalent figure, because it is a hand that shakes him, and thus threatens and attacks him. Therefore, the helping hands that are appealed to are also exposed as responsible hands. As in “Meine zwei Hände”, the hands are both the attacking and the attacked instance. The merciless hand (“unbarmherzige Hand”) is

what causes the need for intervention, and the merciful hands (“hilfsbereite Hände”) are appealed to for assistance.

“Meine zwei Hände” reflects this ambivalence. Hands represent the loss of control over the narrator’s body, but also the saving intervention and final image of the “peaceful” right hand. This is also similar to the hand as it occurs in *Der Proceß*, in the image of the anonymous, abstract, “irgendeine Hand” that seizes Josef K., while the hand is also used in Josef K.’s own transgressions, when he attacks others, or “penetrates the world with twenty hands,” or even as it symbolizes Josef K.’s work within the economic sphere that renders him an accomplice within the system to which he falls victim.

The responsibility of the employee at his desk

Reiner Stach points out that many of the “Kriegszitterer” for which the calls for donations were intended were also accused of faking their psychological trauma, and that Kafka, who was so closely involved with the sanatoriums must have known that cruel experiments were being conducted with soldiers: “er war *Mitwisser* des Krieges, und so unscharf seine Vorstellungen von den militärischen Kampfzonen auch waren, so genau wusste Kafka Bescheid über die langfristigen Verheerungen, die jene Schrecken im zivilen Leben hinterließen—er wusste darüber genauer Bescheid als jeder andere Schriftsteller seiner Zeit.”³⁶² Kafkas knowledge and desk work bore great responsibility, and possibly a considerate amount of guilt.

It was not only the general involvement as part of a governmental institution that must have weighed on Kafka, but also and especially the physical effects of the war on the body that he had to witness daily. The contact with the wounded victims was now direct and unmediated, and Kafka was confronted with individual experiences constantly, since almost all these cases constituted precedents, and unlike for accidents, there were no forms to fill out, so that constant “Parteienverkehr” became the main way to communicate, which meant interaction with severely injured and mutilated veterans.³⁶³ These sights were new and shocking, even to someone who was familiar with industrial accidents. When trains with wounded soldiers returned, efforts were made to keep them separate from the general population,³⁶⁴ but for Kafka, the confrontation with these wounded soldiers became an everyday experience that made the horrors of an industrialized war all too visible.

Amputations and Prosthetics

In a letter to his sister Ottla, Kafka writes about his urge to look away when he sees wounded veterans in the street.³⁶⁵ The opposite is required of him at the office. Already in the winter of 1914/15, the masses of returning injured soldiers was larger than what could be handled by any local initiatives.³⁶⁶ Therefore, these efforts were centralized by the ministry of the interior, and public agencies for returning veterans were established; since there was no time to create new structures, the AUVA institutes were used. In 1915, “Fürsorge für die heimkehrenden Krieger”

became an official additional task of the Prague office. The number of war invalids, mostly amputees, that came to the institute was so large that they were inundating the hallways; Kafka and his colleague Eugen Pfohl took over the duties of the “Ausschuß für Heilbehandlung,”³⁶⁷ “wo über medizinische Rehabilitation und berufliche Wiedereingliederung von Kriegsoptionen entschieden wurde.”³⁶⁸ Kafka and his colleague had to quickly become immersed into these areas and they were the contacts for questions of prosthetics, which hospitals could treat what kind of injuries, and which hospitals could become dedicated to war injuries exclusively. As Stach describes it, this required extensive correspondence, the thorough reviewing of scientific publications, consultations with medical professionals, travel and on-site inspections, including for example the two “Versehrtschulen” that were located close to the AUVA, where amputees learned how to use new prosthetics.³⁶⁹

In a combination of its original and additional functions, the AUVA also had to deal with new matters of work disabilities that were of unprecedented extent and led to lists such as these:

Chemische Industrie: Leute ohne Arm und Fuß können Kanzleidiener, Torwächter oder Wagemeister sein. . . .

Färber: Fehlen eines Armes oder Unterarmes macht unverwendbar.
(Kunstfuß mit Stelze nicht verwendbar.

Friseure, Raseure und Perückenmacher: Leute sind noch zu verwenden beim Fehlen eines kleinen Fingers oder eines Auges, sofern das zweite vollkommen gesund ist. . . .

Mechaniker: Beide Arme notwendig. Feinmechaniker können einarmig sein.

Photographen: Retoucheure oder Kopisten können den linken Arm sowie einzelne Finger sowie ein Auge entbehren.

Tischler: beim Fehlen eines Armes keine Verwendung, wohl aber wenn bloß die Hand fehlt. Nicht hinderlich ist das Fehlen eines Auges oder des Kiefers.

Zahntechniker: Muß beide Hände haben, kann aber künstliche Beine besitzen.³⁷⁰

Injuries were by no means limited to hands, but the extreme situation of the war—an unprecedented amount of hands were lost, at a moment when hands were desperately needed—is reflected in the research of hand functions that reached a high point during the war and that took the research on hands in a variety of disciplines to a new level.³⁷¹

The replaceability of the human body and especially the hand stands in the center of the scientific research on prosthetics. While research on the human hand was already well under way before the war, as I've shown in my first chapter, the new detailed research on hand functions triggered by the large number of amputations and prosthetics—the research that Kafka had to familiarize himself with in his new function—is inseparably linked to World War I. Fritz Giese, one of the most prominent experts in this field directly refers to his research being linked to the war. In his introduction, he points to the “valuable” experiences of war injuries for hand research:

Es ist historisch beachtlich, daß die erste Darstellung einer Psychologie der Hand in der neueren Wissenschaft — das Buch Vaschides aus dem Jahr 1909 — so gut wie keine Resonanz bei uns gefunden hat. Erst der Krieg erbrachte die wertvollen Erfahrungen der Hirnverletztenpsychologie, der Orthopädie, des Prothesenbaues.³⁷²

The researcher Narziß Ach also used his experience as staff doctor during the war for his research.³⁷³ The psychologist David Katz, who would go on to publish an extensive study on the sense of touch, likewise refers back to World War I as the point of origination for his research on hands: “Die Kriegsjahre haben einen starken Anstoß zur Untersuchung der Physiologie und Psychologie der Hand gegeben.”³⁷⁴ “The war is thus a catalyst for the importance of the study of the human hand that takes the research of industrial work to a further level³⁷⁵, but also focuses explicitly on the psychology of the hand.

“Arbeitshand” and “Ausdruckshand”

The question that fueled the debates about prosthetics during the war itself was: How should the hand that contains such a complexity of functions be replaced? It is especially two dimensions of the hand that seem incompatible: The hand as tool, fulfilling a function, and the hand as medium for psychological expression.³⁷⁶ Fritz Giese called these two dimensions “Arbeitshand” and “Ausdruckshand”:

Arbeitshand war die werktätige Extremität, die in ihrem Tun gewissermaßen mit effektiven Leistungen . . . verbunden ist und am Dinglichen (Stoff, Material) sich äußert. . . . Ausdruckshand ist etwas ganz anderes. . . .

Man kann also unter Ausdruckshand verstehen die psychisch gestaltende, im immateriellen Feld tätige Extremität, die nicht so schöpferisches Organ, als Spiegel seelischer Einstellungen des Ichs sein möchte und nützlicher Ausdrucksgebarung fern bleibt. Formgemäß arbeitet die Ausdruckshand mit Gesten.³⁷⁷

These two dimensions of the hand mirror in an intensified way the differing views on the subject discussed in the previous chapters: the subject as part of a collective, in an impersonal view, and the subject as an individual that exists beyond work. In “Meine zwei Hände”, too, the hand is presented as an anonymous machine, and at the same time the hands appear as individuals with lives of their own.

One way to avoid the problem of the tension between the views was to avoid the conflict rather than solve it and focus exclusively on the desired work function.

Katz summarizes:

Die Bemühungen um einen leistungsfähigen Ersatz der amputierten Hand ließen die hervorragende Stellung dieses Universalinstruments in einer Weise hervortreten, daß man sich sehr bald von der Notwendigkeit überzeugete, auf eine getreue Nachbildung zu verzichten, und sich mit Prothesen zu begnügen, welche die eine oder die andere Teilfunktion ausüben konnten. Und auch diesen ging noch die Empfindlichkeit ab, welche die natürliche Hand “bis in die Fingerspitzen” beseelt.³⁷⁸

In such cases, that were for instance argued for by Ach, it is not the hand as a unit of the body that is replicated, but a specific function that needs to be replaced for a specific profession.³⁷⁹ Prostheses developed for this were instances in which the hand literally became the tool, was replaced by it. Such hands had telling names—“Arbeitsklauen” “Arbeitskrallen”—negating in function as well as in their name the complex nature of the human hand by using the animal designations of Kralle and Klaue, something that seems present in various Kafka protagonists: “Krallen” and hands that are compared to objects, as well as, in “Meine zwei Hände,” both in the right hand being likened to the piston and in the dehumanizing image of the right

hand as “fünfköpfiger Höllenhund.” These contraptions were metal hooks, or other sharp metal shapes, and looked accordingly raw and crass. When outside the workplace, these could be replaced by a non-functional, but more arm-like looking “Sonntagsarm,” “Schönheitsarm,” or “Schmuckarm”.³⁸⁰

Wilhelm Neutra, another researcher of prosthetics, argued, in 1917, that a work prosthesis should not only focus on the mechanics of work, but also on the individual psyche of the amputee, rejecting the idea of a one-function hand and the separation of form and function.³⁸¹ Here, it was the psychological effect of the prosthesis that was relevant—Neutra and other researchers agreed early on that certain prostheses could severely inhibit the person’s ability for self-expression, even in cases where they did not directly involve the hands themselves. One example are “characteristic” hand movements that are linked to specific emotions, not only as a result of these emotions, but to an extent that such a movement can be reproduced or trigger the emotion, a phenomenon common among actors and artists, as Stefan Rieger notes.³⁸² Neutra stresses the necessity for individual prostheses and the importance of the psychological aspect. Rieger describes Neutra’s example in “Zur Psychologie der Prothese” of a man who is a passionate fencer in his free time. A prosthesis that would enable him to do his daily work but not his personal hobby or sport would severely affect his quality of life and have deep effects on his psychological well-being and that of his family. This could, according to Neutra, be solved by including the ability to fence in his prosthesis (even if it technically impairs the prosthesis for other functions). He takes the hypothetical case of the fencer and compares it to empirical studies of the question of natural expression in

writing, an activity that also notoriously links the technical act with the thoughts it expresses. The difference between writing or dictating a text is cited by Neutra,³⁸³ something that had long been of personal interest to Kafka; it comes up, for example, in the dictation scenes in *Der Verschollene*, or in the correspondence with Felice Bauer, who worked with dictation devices and had typed manuscripts for other writers.

While it is not known which particular studies Kafka knew, he was through his profession familiar with some of the research,³⁸⁴ and examples such as the expressivity of movements and gestures were certainly of great interest to him. In fact, “Meine zwei Hände” takes up the theme of expression through hands, and the lack thereof, with its emphasis on the tension between mind and hand, in addition to the image of amputation and the “object” hand in the image of the piston.

Keeping in mind Kafka’s earlier diary entries on his theater experiences, and his writing, as discussed in chapter 3, it is very hard to imagine that the theoretical research and the work with actual amputees who needed to learn how to use these prosthetics did not resonate profoundly with his strong sensitivity to everything hand-related. As I have shown, observations of the theatrical and the writing hand in his diaries, fragments and letters are almost a “genre” in their own right. Even diary entries that describe his theater experiences go beyond just noting gestures—hand movements are seen with quasi medical, “x-ray” vision of the body: “Sie spricht sehr scharf auch ihre Bewegungen sind so von dem durchgebogenen Daumen angefangen, der statt der Knochen harte Sehnen zu haben scheint.”³⁸⁵ But such hand

reflections are not limited to theater and writing, but to various reflections, observations and self-observations. In these, hands are connected to emotions or even anticipate them, similar to what Kafka will encounter in the articles on the psychological causes and effects of hand functions and replacements. Just as in the research of hand psychology, in Kafka's observations, it is often the hand movement that actually causes the emotion: "Endet dieses Gespräch auch noch mit einem Händedruck, so geht man mit dem augenblicklichen Glauben an ein reines und festes Gefüge unseres Lebens und mit Achtung davor auseinander."³⁸⁶ As in the articles of the prosthetic researchers will state, the hands are very closely connected to actions such as speaking or writing. Describing a conversation, he describes what his hands do, and their function is directly connected to the act of speaking: "Ich hatte das Geländer zur Stütze der Hände und Satzbetonungen."³⁸⁷ A similar moment of the nexus between emotion, expression, and hands is also found here: "Ruhiges, zurückgezogenes Gespräch mit Fräulein T. im Zwischenakt des Erdgeist auf der Galerie. Man muß förmlich, um ein gutes Gespräch zu erreichen die Hand tiefer, leichter, verschlafener unter den zu behandelnden Gegenstand schieben, dann hebt man ihn zum Erstaunen. Sonst knickt man sich die Finger ein und denkt an nichts als an die Schmerzen."³⁸⁸ The diary entries quoted above are written before the war, but after his employment by the AUVA. They thus already are written with a heightened sensitivity and come from and after the period when Kafka wrote the text on accident prevention.

Considering this high sensitivity for manual expression and the connection to psychological processes, Kafka certainly was painfully aware of the discrepancies

between hand-function and hand-expression in war amputees and the research on prosthetics. The war exacerbated the problematic insurance view on the human body, and especially on the human hand as well as intensified the tension between the individual subject and the statistically “average” person. “Meine zwei Hände” performs this disconnect literally. It belongs to the “genre” of his hand observations as they appear in earlier diary entries, and it is a similarly artful display of hand expressions combining elements of a miniature theater with writing reflections and psychological introspection. However, it is more violent and more radical in its depiction of the threats by and to the hand - it captures both the potential for expression and individuality, but also the extreme violence and threat to the subject. It continues the earlier strong sensitivity towards hand expression, but one can also sense the new knowledge about amputations and prostheses.³⁸⁹

Traces of amputation and prosthetic imagery can be found in other texts from 1917 as well, for example the hands being wound out of the wrist in “Ein altes Blatt,” which I have addressed above; the “Hände, die eigentlich Dampfhammer sind,” in “Auf der Galerie,”³⁹⁰ “das Handgelenk eines Anglers” in one of the fragments;³⁹¹ Rotpeter’s fantasy, when offended by a journalist, of wanting to “jedes Fingerchen seiner schreibenden Hand einzeln wegknallen” in “Ein Bericht für eine Akademie”;³⁹² and “eine lange, schwache, eingetrocknete, holzfarbige Hand, wenn sie nachlässig und selbstvergessen auf dem Pult lag”³⁹³ in a fragment from 1919. In all these examples, the hand relates to tensions between conflicting, impersonal-statistical versus individual, views on the subject: In “Auf der Galerie,” two paragraphs describe the same situation, but from two very different perspectives:

the first one looks at an impending accident, with the narrator considering to intervene, whereas the second one focuses on the personal aspects of the circus performance. The image of the hands as machines that are rhythmically clapping supports the de-individualized perspective of the first paragraph. The hands are not just likened to the “Dampfhämmer,” but are metonymically replaced by them. The “angler” sits at home at his desk and imagines, almost statistically, the hand movement of fishing, creating a tension between the actual individual act of fishing, and the characteristic, but theoretical movement of fishing. Rotpeter is caught within the tension between being and not being a part of the human community; the fantasy occurs at a moment where he narrates the insult of a journalist who claims he still behaves like an animal. The wood-colored hand that evokes a prosthetic hand belongs to a female store clerk and is contemplated by a young apprentice who wants to kiss the hand, taking up the motif from “Der Heizer” of Karl contemplating and kissing the “almost” dead hand of the stoker. The hand is described in a context where every store employee has characteristic deformations from working in his or her respective profession; and the clerk’s hand has assimilated to the wooden surface of the “Pult”. The objectified hand then becomes back alive and turns into an objectifying hand by assigning the apprentice new tasks, which he fulfills while secretly crying. In “Meine zwei Hände”, apart from the direct imagery of amputations and prosthetics, the fact that Kafka combines such a detailed hand observation with a violent battle emphasizes the importance of the hand for the theme of the war as well.

Writing and fighting hands: Kafka's personal war struggles

In "Meine zwei Hände", the narrator reflects on whether the left hand is fit for battle, and then gives reasons as to why not, the life that the hand has led so far not being an adequate preparation. This issue, which in the text appears as an unexpected, almost playful personification of the hand, was in fact extremely relevant for Kafka, who by 1916 had tried to enlist for active duty three times.³⁹⁴ Even though the AUVA had successfully argued for Kafka's exemption from military service, he now demanded his superiors to let him serve at the latest in the fall of 1916. In 1915, he wrote to Felice Bauer: "[Ich] leide . . . am Krieg meistens dadurch, daß ich nicht selbst dort bin."³⁹⁵ The fact that he tried to enlist repeatedly (a fact that is still little known and that may strike many Kafka readers as counterintuitive even when it is known) was possibly a reaction to his professional responsibilities for injured war veterans, and the direct confrontation with the effects of the war. Moreover, working for a (semi-)governmental agency had significant implications during the war; the guilt and responsibility of the desk worker who administrates the human body must have increased during these years. "Meine zwei Hände" presents the intervention into the war of the hands as potentially immoral, and it might be a reflection on his own war interventions. In 1916, he finally gave his superiors an outright ultimatum: either let him serve, or give him a half or entire year of unpaid vacation, most likely in order to focus on his writing.³⁹⁶ However, Kafka's superiors declined both; instead, it is made clear to him that his contribution to the war is best made from the space of the desk.

Either to serve in the military or to retreat from any work responsibility with a vacation seems like two fundamentally opposite desires. In Kafka scholarship, the war itself is a key point of contention about the extent of his engagement with the politics of his day; particularly, one often cites his laconic diary entry from August 2, 1914: “Deutschland hat Rußland den Krieg erklärt—Nachmittag Schwimmschule.”³⁹⁷ This is often taken as proof of a radically apolitical stance. But in fact for Kafka, the war was inseparable from his private and personal realms. Specifically, he associated writing with war even before 1914,³⁹⁸ and much more explicitly during the war. On July 31, three days after Austria declared war on Serbia, Kafka writes: “Ich habe keine Zeit. Es ist allgemeine Mobilisierung. . . . Aber schreiben werde ich trotz alledem, unbedingt, es ist mein Kampf um die Selbsterhaltung”.³⁹⁹ In an entry from September 1914, he explicitly likens the thoughts about the war with the “Gedankengänge” about writing, too, and even likens them to his love life, showing the inseparability between the personal and the political for him:

Wieder kaum 2 Seiten. Zuerst dachte ich die Traurigkeit über die österreichischen Niederlagen und die Angst vor der Zukunft (eine Angst die mir im Grunde lächerlich und zugleich infam vorkommt) werden mich überhaupt am Schreiben hindern. . . . Die Gedankengänge die sich an den Krieg knüpfen sind in der quälenden Art mit der sie mich in den verschiedensten Richtungen zerfressen ähnlich den alten Sorgen wegen F. . . . Ich habe zwar mit aller Kraftaufwendung einer damals verhältnismäßig noch wenig geschwächten Natur wenig gegen die Sorgen wegen F. ausgerichtet, aber ich hatte damals nur in der Anfangszeit die große Hilfe des Schreibens, die ich mir jetzt nicht mehr entreißen lassen will.⁴⁰⁰

How much personal life and war are intertwined for him becomes clear in a diary

entry from November 1915, where again the thoughts on the war are inextricably interwoven with his own writing and channeled into the image of a rhythmically moving hand:

Aufregungszustand nachmittag. Begann mit der Überlegung ob und wieviel Kriegsanleihe ich mir kaufen sollte. Gieng zweimal zum Geschäft hin, um den nötigen Auftrag zu geben und zweimal zurück, ohne eingetreten zu sein. Berechnete fieberhaft die Zinsen. Bat dann die Mutter 1000 K-Anleihe zu kaufen, erhöhte aber den Betrag auf 2000 K. Es zeigte sich dabei, daß ich von einer etwa 3000 K betragenden Einlage, die mir gehörte gar nicht gewußt hatte und daß es mich fast gar nicht berührte als ich davon erfuhr. Nur die Zweifel wegen der Kriegsanleihe lagen mir im Kopf und hörten nun etwa ½ Stunde lang auf einem Spaziergang durch die belebtesten Gassen nicht auf. Ich fühlte mich unmittelbar am Krieg beteiligt, erwog, allerdings meinen Kenntnissen entsprechend, ganz allgemein die finanziellen Aussichten, steigerte und verringerte die Zinsen, die mir einmal zur Verfügung stehen würden u.s.f. Allmählich verwandelte sich aber diese Aufregung, die Gedanken wurden auf das Schreiben hingelenkt, ich fühlte mich dazu fähig, wollte nichts anderes als die Möglichkeit des Schreibens haben, überlegte, welche Nächte ich in der nächsten Zeit dafür bestimmen könnte, lief unter Herzschmerzen über die steinerne Brücke, fühlte das schon so oft erfahrene Unglück des verzehrenden Feuers das nicht ausbrechen darf, erfand um mich auszudrücken und zu beruhigen den Spruch "Freundchen ergieße Dich", sang ihn unaufhörlich nach einer besondern Melodie und begleitete den Gesang, indem ich ein Taschentuch in der Tasche wie einen Dudelsack immer wieder drückte und losließ.⁴⁰¹

The entry starts with his thoughts about the subscription to war bonds, a “measure of commitment to Austrian victory” and sign of allegiance to the common cause.⁴⁰²

But for Kafka, the financial thoughts also very much affect his personal liberties.

Stach point out that just before the war, Kafka had concrete plans to quit his job and move to Berlin, sustaining himself as a writer.⁴⁰³ The war also affected Kafka’s dream of retiring since the money invested in war bonds could realistically be counted as lost and pushed the dream of full-time writing further away. In the entry,

the financial thoughts become layered with thoughts of his own participation in the war, and he feels a certain immediacy (“Ich fühlte mich unmittelbar am Krieg beteiligt”) even though this participation consists in economic and strategic planning (“erwog, allerdings meinen Kenntnissen entsprechend, ganz allgemein die finanziellen Aussichten”). These calculations morph into calculations about when to write under the circumstances, which triggers a sudden desire to do so. Attention is shifted to the hand in his pocket pressing his handkerchief, standing in for the almost uncontrollable desire to write and to express himself (“mich auszudrücken”), which turns into the literal act of pressing (“drücken”) the handkerchief, accompanying his words, as if thinking, speaking, or even singing them weren’t enough. The act of writing itself is reproduced by the rhythmic hand movement.

In October 1921, Kafka links an image of being buried under rubble with his writing hand:

Derjenige der mit dem Leben nicht lebendig fertig wird, braucht die eine Hand, um die Verzweiflung über sein Schicksal ein wenig abzuwehren -- es geschieht sehr unvollkommen -- mit der andern Hand aber kann er eintragen, was er unter den Trümmern sieht, denn er sieht anderes und mehr als die andern, er ist doch tot zu Lebzeiten und der eigentlich Überlebende. Wobei vorausgesetzt ist, daß er nicht beide Hände und mehr als er hat, zum Kampf mit der Verzweiflung braucht.⁴⁰⁴

This image conjures up the multiple hands from Josef K.’s fantasy of seizing the world with twenty hands, since one needs multiple hands for the “Kampf.” In addition, it also treats writing as a question of life and death. Finally, it is worth quoting again his last diary entry, discussed in my previous chapter, which links a

battle scene with the writing hand, giving the existential writing struggle an additional dimension:

Immer ängstlicher im Niederschreiben. Es ist begreiflich. Jedes Wort, gewendet in der Hand der Geister -- dieser Schwung der Hand ist ihre charakteristische Bewegung -- wird zum Spieß, gekehrt gegen den Sprecher. Eine Bemerkung wie diese ganz besonders. Und so ins Unendliche. Der Trost wäre nur: es geschieht ob Du willst oder nicht. Und was Du willst, hilft nur unmerklich wenig. Mehr als Trost ist: Auch Du hast Waffen.⁴⁰⁵ T926

The mild comfort of the own “weapon” is the writing hand as a fighting hand, the very same hand that writes about fighting hands and the internalized violence that comes with modern work practices, and to an even more extreme extent, with modern warfare, both of which is captured so succinctly in “Meine zwei Hände.”

Conclusion: “Die Hände in den Hosentaschen”

In this dissertation, I have traced the development of the previously overlooked figure of the hand through Kafka’s literary, professional, and personal writings and shown the pervasiveness and development of this trope. I have found that hands occur in Kafka’s writings whenever the subject is under attack or its position is under negotiation and its agency, identity, and physical integrity are threatened. The first chapter examined these attacks on the subject by showing opposing perspectives on the worker: as an individual on the one hand, and as anonymous part of the larger machinery of production on the other hand. The second chapter further reflected on this opposition by including Kafka’s professional writings and by showing the influence of modern accident insurance on the tension between the subject as an individual and as statistical, “average” human. The third chapter illustrated how this conflict in addition to the blue collar worker also affects the white collar employee K., who uses his hands to try to overcome the abstraction and anonymity of the court and regain lost agency, and showed that this struggle of agency also affects the writer. In the fourth chapter, “Meine zwei Hände” draws together these dimensions of manual labor, white-collar responsibility, and literary authorship and at the same time exemplifies how World War One has led to an intensification of the conflicts described in the previous chapters.

The hand in all these contexts is the site of the conflicts and attacks on the

modern subject. The stoker's cracked, almost dead hand shows the objectification and physical threats that his work entails, as do the illustrations of the accident prevention text. Josef K.'s attempt to seize the world with twenty hands exemplifies how this struggle is carried out through hands, and in "Meine zwei Hände," the hand appears both as attacker and attacked instance in the narrator's struggle. Hands are the primary trope of social critique and illustrate the violence that the subject faces in order to be part of modern human society. They appear wherever the subject's agency and identity are threatened and contested. As such, the hand treats no less than the question of what it means to be a modern human. I will conclude this dissertation by showing that the hand in addition to defining contested areas relating to work, war, and writing also defines for Kafka what it means to be human, both biologically and within contemporary society.

The text that examines this question most literally is Kafka's "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie," featuring an ape-author, Rotpeter.⁴⁰⁶ Looking at Rotpeter's hands shows how fundamentally the hand relates to modern human identity. This famous text is often read with a focus on the outsider, with Rotpeter as epitomizing Jewish, or animal, or non-European identities, and these are of course legitimate and important interpretations. But the text can be read even in broader terms, as illustrating the attacks that every modern human subject has to suffer just by being a member of modern human society. Rotpeter himself makes it clear that he does not want to write about his apedom, but about how he became human in an accelerated act of evolution, and Kafka has his narrator Rotpeter explicitly choose the hand as a trope for what it means to be human.

“Bericht” uses the hand as a site where Rotpeter’s struggle for agency and identity takes place and it is connected to the figure of the hand also through its proximity to “Meine zwei Hände,” which I have examined in my last chapter. “Meine zwei Hände” is found between a previous and the final version of “Bericht” and can be understood as a laboratory for finding the right narrative perspective and voice. In addition, there are also structural similarities between the texts.⁴⁰⁷ “Meine zwei Hände” may in fact provide Rotpeter’s main trope for what it means to be human. In the two Rotpeter-fragments preceding “Meine zwei Hände,” hands don’t play a prominent role. In Bericht, however, the hand is explicitly presented as the quintessential marker of successful membership to human society, even more so than the fact that Rotpeter can speak:

Das erste, was ich lernte, war: den Handschlag geben; Handschlag bezeugt Offenheit; mag nun heute, wo ich auf dem Höhepunkte meiner Laufbahn stehe, zu jenem ersten Handschlag auch das offene Wort hinzukommen.⁴⁰⁸

But while the hand here seemingly contains the promise of peaceful coexistence in the human community, it is also a site of criticism and a means of showing the underlying violence. The openness that Rotpeter refers to twice in this passage is deceptive, because he uses the same term (“offen gesprochen” [300]) twice in order to decline the request by the academy to write a report about his “äffisches Vorleben” (299) and instead chooses to write about his joining of human society and reaching the “Durschnittsbildung eines Europäers” (312). The latter can be understood in two ways. It can mean the average education of a European, but it could also be read as the construction or act of constituting the average European.

Rotpeter's own position would therefore be that of a modern human and his description of his situation would constitute a critique of what it means to be a member of human society.

The handshake is thus less "open" than Rotpeter makes the reader initially believe. "Handschlag" itself contains a moment of violence in the element of "schlagen," and it is not just a gesture of greeting, but also of an assertion of dominance. And when taking into account the hand passages that appear in Bericht, the hand has different, more problematic connotations. Rotpeter's training begins when he decides to imitate the men he sees through the cage bars. One of the first details that Rotpeter notices about the men on the ship is their hands: "Wollte sich einer die Augen reiben, so hob er die Hand wie ein Hängegewicht" (305). The hands here literally carry a disproportionate weight in Rotpeter's assessment of the situation. The hand is not only depicted as disproportionately heavy, but the hand also stands out as "gigantic" in Rotpeter's description of the direct interaction with a man on the ship who has taken on the task to train him:

Und zur Ehre meines Lehrers: er war mir nicht böse; wohl hielt er mir manchmal die brennende Pfeife ans Fell, bis es irgendwo, wo ich nur schwer hinreichte, zu glimmen anfang, aber dann löschte er es selbst wieder mit seiner riesigen guten Hand. (310)

In addition to "riesig", here, the qualifier that he assigns to the hand is "gut". This definition and evaluation of the hand as good while at the same time describing cruel behavior shows how the hands on the surface signify integration, but underneath that surface embodies a moment of violence. It is the same hand that

moments before had set Rotpeter's fur on fire (specifically where he can't reach it with his own "hand") that gets qualified as good or benevolent, so the function of the hand here is a complex one, as is the function of the men on the ship, when he says: "Es sind gute Menschen, trotz allem" (305).

Instead of a sign of openness and success, the author Rotpeter presents the hand as the site of the violence that underlies his own socialization. Therefore, it is no surprise that it is in turn the hand that is part of a revenge fantasy, when Rotpeter feels attacked by a journalist:

Letzthin las ich in einem Aufsatz irgendeines der zehntausend Windhunde, die sich in den Zeitungen über mich auslassen: meine Affennatur sei noch nicht ganz unterdrückt; Beweis dessen sei, daß ich, wenn Besucher kommen, mit Vorliebe die Hosen ausziehe, um die Einlaufstelle jenes Schusses zu zeigen. Dem Kerl sollte jedes Fingerchen seiner schreibenden Hand einzeln weggeknallt werden. (301-302)

It is explicitly a writing hand that Rotpeter wants to destroy finger by finger.

Through that writing hand, Rotpeter's own identity is at stake, not only as an author over his own narrative that his critic has attacked but as member of human society. Rotpeter in turn attacks what is quintessentially human, the hand. While compared to other animals, apes have hands that are very close to the human hand, it is the opposable thumb that makes the human hand quintessentially human, a feature that Rotpeter lacks. Even in the phrasing of the fantasy, the lack of the human hand and the lack of agency is evident, because he cannot pull the trigger himself, and uses an impersonal phrasing ("man sollte").

Rotpeter tries to regain his agency by reversing the roles of human and animal. He calls the journalist by an animal name, "Windhund." The fact that it is one of ten thousand animals is further taking away markers of personal identity, and it is one random specimen ("irgendeines"). He does to the journalist what he had to do to himself in order to be part of human society. He also anticipates an observation that he will reveal later in the report about how he observed the men on the ship in order to imitate them: "Ich sah diese Menschen auf und ab gehen, immer die gleichen Gesichter, die gleichen Bewegungen, oft schien es mir, als wäre es nur einer. Dieser Mensch oder diese Menschen gingen also unbehelligt" (307).⁴⁰⁹ Similar to his achieving of the "Durchschnittsbildung," he looks at an average, almost statistical human rather than individuals; being human means being viewed from a de-individualizing point of view. The fact that the revenge fantasy consists of the act of shooting the journalist is a reversal of agency as well, because Rotpeter has himself been shot when he was captured.

Kafka reinforces the image of the hand by focusing particular attention on the fingers and the number five with imagery that is obsessively elaborate. When he specifies that he wants to shoot each finger separately, suggesting five successive shots, he takes up the motif of the number five which is important as a marker of his identity as ape and human and occurs in two other key passages of Bericht where animal and human identities are negotiated and reversed.⁴¹⁰ The first instance of Rotpeter mentioning the number five is when he uses it as proof of his alleged distance of his ape origins:

Nahezu fünf Jahre trennen mich vom Affentum, eine Zeit, kurz vielleicht am Kalender gemessen, unendlich lang aber durchzugalloppieren, so wie ich es getan habe, streckenweise begleitet von vortrefflichen Menschen, Ratschlägen, Beifall und Orchestralmusik, aber im Grunde allein, denn alle Begleitung hielt sich, um im Bilde zu bleiben, weit vor der Barriere. (299)

The five years become charged with unstable identity. Their perceived length is likened to a horse track through which he gallops. This metaphor is further emphasized when he specifies that he continues to use it “um im Bilde zu bleiben.” The animal metaphor is reinforced, and consciously so. Describing the act of becoming human with animal metaphors thus creates a confusion between the identities. The second example of five as a marker of animal-human identity struggles concerns the struggle for agency in Rotpeter’s training:

Als ich meiner Fähigkeiten schon sicherer geworden war, die Öffentlichkeit meinen Fortschritten folgte, meine Zukunft zu leuchten begann, nahm ich selbst Lehrer auf, ließ sie in fünf aufeinanderfolgenden Zimmern niedersetzen und lernte bei allen zugleich, indem ich ununterbrochen aus einem Zimmer ins andere sprang. (312)

Rotpeter presents this as another inversion of agency, shortly after he describes how he was given to the first trainer in Hamburg. Here, it is he himself who hires the teachers, and he emphasizes that they work for him. Finally, the number five recalls another passage of hand violence: The ending of “Meine zwei Hände” where the right hand is described as five-headed Cerberus. Not only does “fünfköpfig” correspond with the five shots of the violent hand passage in Bericht, but “Windhund” also can be seen as trace of the “Höllenhund.”⁴¹¹ The image of the human hand turned into a dog contains a violent tension between the human and

the animal.

Throughout Kafka's works, the hand contains the negotiation between the border of humans and animals. Hands distinguish humans from animals, but also serve to dissimulate the differences. Some animals explicitly lack hands, and therefore have a clear deficit: Gregor Samsa, for example cannot get out of bed because he would have needed hands to do so:

Er hätte Arme und Hände gebraucht, um sich aufzurichten; statt dessen aber hatte er nur die vielen Beinchen, die ununterbrochen in der verschiedensten Bewegung waren und die er überdies nicht beherrschen konnte." (121)

Throughout "Die Verwandlung", he watches his family members' hands at work, such as the mother's sewing or the sister's playing an instrument. "Schakale und Araber," a story that was published together with "Bericht," features another view of the human hand from an animal perspective, when the jackals ask for human help in their confrontation with the Arabs:

Darum, o Herr, darum o teurer Herr, mit Hilfe deiner alles vermögenden Hände, mit Hilfe deiner alles vermögenden Hände schneide ihnen mit dieser Schere die Hälse durch!" Und einem Ruck seines Kopfes folgend kam ein Schakal herbei, der an einem Eckzahn eine kleine, mit altem Rost bedeckte Nähsschere trug. (273-274)

Here too, the hands are what is human, and mark an agency that the jackals lack.

The sentence about the omnipotent human hands is repeated and illustrated by the fact that the jackals lack the ability to hold the scissors and that they hang in their mouth instead. The fact that it is a "Nähsschere" emphasizes the delicate and

meticulous function of the human hand. But the hand as marker of human identity is by no means clear-cut, since Kafka's animals can have hands, such as the animal in "Der Bau," or the mouse Josefina. Instead, the hands are the site where human identity and agency are negotiated and consciously confused by combining human and animal qualities. The hand is both a marker of human identity as well as its vulnerability. By confusing human and animal identities, human identity appears as threatened, and the hand is the site of the attack.

Rotpeter is in between humans and animals; he refers to his own hands, but at the same time has to hide them. He not only begins his account with a hand image, but he also ends it with one:

Überblicke ich meine Entwicklung und ihr bisheriges Ziel, so klage ich weder, noch bin ich zufrieden. Die Hände in den Hosentaschen, die Weinflasche auf dem Tisch, liege ich halb, halb sitze ich im Schaukelstuhl und schaue aus dem Fenster. (312-313)

Rotpeter's Bericht closes with this staging of a bourgeois scene of leisure, both emphasizing his status as human and one of a relatively high social status at that. The hands are what defines him as human, but just as the bottle of wine that brings to mind violent drinking images from the training period on the ship, the hands contain the dilemma of his becoming a modern human: While serving as proof of humanity and successful acculturation, they are, while prominently mentioned, at the same time defined as absent, as Rotpeter hides them in his pockets, recalling the oppressed stoker in *Der Verschollene* who hides his hands in his pockets.⁴¹² While he knows the quintessentially human gestures, he does not have the quintessentially

human body part being an ape; for Rotpeter the hand thus links the success of the acculturation at the same time with its impossibility. Here, too, the hand is not only the marker of human identity, but also contains the hidden potential for what is inherently problematic about being a modern human. Having to hide and immobilize the hands is the price that one pays in order to be a member of human civilization, and the passive hands cannot protect against the attacks on agency and identity.

The hand in addition to treating Kafka's views on writing, work and war contains the essence of humanity and civilization and hands are the target of the attacks and violence associated with the overpowering social forces of the early twentieth century. Towards the end of the trial, K. attempts to protect his hands and himself in an almost comically ineffectual way by putting on gloves. But K. is no more able to protect his hands or himself than Gregor is able to remove the rotting apple from his back with the leg that used to be a hand, or Rotpeter is able to put out his burning fur or shoot his critics. Thus the hand for Kafka isn't the stark fist of the worker's movement but a mocking and pathetic reminder of man's constant striving and constant failure.

¹ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 8. Emphasis added.

² Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 926. Emphasis added.

³ Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 262.

⁴ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 2*, 125.

⁵ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 2*, 104-105.

⁶ Kafka, *Briefe 1900-1912*, 241.

⁷ Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle*, 55-56.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 61; 60.

⁹ Kafka, *Briefe 1900-1912*, 241.

¹⁰ I have only found one article that specifically examines the figure of the hand (but only in *Der Proceß*) Annie Ring's "In the Law's Hands: S/M Pleasure in *Der Proceß*, a Queer Reading", though in a different context from my reading. Ring uses queer theory to focus on erotic relationships and sadomasochism. I will engage with this article in my third chapter. Hartmut Binder has a chapter on "Hände" in his study *Kafka in neuer Sicht. Mimik, Gestik und Personengefüge als Darstellungsformen des Autobiographischen* (241-261) where he focuses on manual gesture as "Ausdrucksträger seelischer Gehalte" (249).

¹¹ For the research on gesture, see the introduction to my third chapter. In short, gesture is read either as part of a text-immanent semantic system and is preoccupied with the question of a language of signs, or more rarely, with contexts beyond the text that are different from my approach, for example that of Kafka's romantic relationships (See Binder, *Kafka in neuer Sicht*, 149-162) or theater and theatricality (See Puchner, "Kafka's Antitheatrical Gestures").

¹² See introductions to chapters 2 and 4 for my use of the research on the insurance background and the war, respectively.

¹³ All page numbers in the text refer to Kafka, *Der Verschollene*.

¹⁴ This depiction of a work accident also presents a setting that leads us directly into the domain of Kafka's accident insurance work, which I will explore in Chapter 2 as an origin of the continuous tension between the views of the worker as well as a direct origin of the figure of the hand itself.

¹⁵ The only treatment of hands in *Der Verschollene* that I have found are two short sections on “Gebärden” in Wolfgang Jahn’s early study *Kafkas Roman “Der Verschollene” (“Amerika”)*, 41-42 and 46-49. Jahn’s brief treatment of gesture, which includes manual gesture, is however limited to pointing out parallel passages for a few specific gestures and does not make any connections to the larger themes of the novel.

¹⁶ For brief discussions of some contexts of industrial work see Rahmani, “In the Belly of the Ship: A Demonstration of Machine Power and Labor Relations”, and Stach, *Kafka: Die Jahre Der Entscheidungen*, 198-200. Rahmani links the text with some contexts of industrial labor within the limited scope of his short article. He establishes a few important connections between passages in “Der Heizer” and the general theme of labor, and makes the important connection between Taylorism and the “industrial” setting of the ship, but limits it to a few passages in the stoker chapter: he mentions Taylorism in the context of the substitution of the foreman by the manager who supervises the work and does not link Taylorism to the depiction of work scenes or work rhythm in *Der Verschollene* which I will do in this chapter. While there is no comprehensive analysis of *Der Verschollene* and the theme of work and production methods, there are a number of related themes: 1. Most importantly, the context of Kafka’s work at the accident insurance. Steel Burrow provides a brilliant analysis of *Der Verschollene* in terms of risk and insurance in Kafka, which is a crucial context that is related to the theme of work, but provides a different focus from the one in this chapter. However, I will take up the themes of risk and insurance in the chapter on the influence of the accident insurance work: Burrow, “Risk and Insurance in the Writings of Franz Kafka.” On *Der Verschollene*, see especially pages 82-165. Klaus Hermsdorf and Klaus Wagenbach, Helmut Jahnke, and recently Benno Wagner and Stanley Corngold have also focused on Kafka’s work at the Workmen’s Accident Insurance, a context that is closely linked to the theme of this chapter, the contemporaneous production methods, and that I will address in detail in my next chapter. 2. The social consciousness of *Der Verschollene* has been commented upon early on: Eduard Goldstücker, when examining Kafka’s relationship to the working class and to socialism in 1963, singles out “Der Heizer” in that respect: “In his longing for human community, he took up the question- as the first bourgeois writer in our part of Europe- of whether he could solve the problems of his life through an approach to the working class.” Goldstücker writes about the character of the stoker: “We would be hard put to find in literature before World War I a work of a non-proletarian author that views with such deep sympathy, and proclaims the rightness of the proletarian cause, ...than Kafka’s”. See Goldstücker, “Franz Kafka in the Prague Perspective: 1963,” 73. Klaus Hermsdorf and Klaus Wagenbach have early on emphasized Kafka’s occupation with class issues, and his sympathies for the “Proletariat”, see for example Hermsdorf, *Kafka: Weltbild und Roman*, and Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: Eine Biographie seiner Jugend 1883-1912*. 3. The somewhat related themes of technology and media have been more widely treated, with the focus on technological and media innovations. While relevant for my reading, the focus is very different, even in texts that partly focus on

Der Verschollene. For readings that focus on the topic of technology, especially Kafka's attitude towards it, see Baumer, "Kafka's Turn to Technology: Intersections of Modern Science and Literature in the Works of Franz Kafka." On *Der Verschollene*, see especially pages 91-124; Benesch, "Writing Machines: Technology and the Failures of Representation in the Works of Franz Kafka," and Goebel, "Kafka in Virilio's Teletopical City." Several articles on Kafka and technology briefly cover the aesthetic and social effects of technology in *Der Verschollene*: Brunner, "Condor und Aeroplan: Interkulturelle und kulturwissenschaftliche Aspekte der Technik- und Wissenschaftsdiskurse bei Adalbert Stifter und Franz Kafka"; Ottersbach, "Kafka an der Kurbel: Zur Bedeutung des Maschinellen im Frühwerk Franz Kafkas." On the theme of technology but not about *Der Verschollene* see: Niebisch, "Kafka's Tourists and the Technological Sublime." Martina Lücke addresses industrial work in the context of technology in a different text, "In der Strafkolonie": Lücke, "'In the Penal Colony' and Beyond: Anxieties about Technology in an Era of Increasing Mechanization." On technological and media innovation see Kittler, "Schreibmaschinen, Sprechmaschinen: Effekte technischer Medien im Werk Franz Kafkas." For readings that focus on photography, see: Hermsdorf, "Die Überwindung der Wirklichkeit durch Überwindung der Fotografie: Fotografische Vorlagen in Franz Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene*" and Duttlinger, "Visions of the New World: Photography in Kafka's *Der Verschollene*."

¹⁷ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 841-842.

¹⁸ The repetition of the movement is also one of the first examples of a recurring figure: hands at work, hands executing rhythmical movements, which I will address in the second section of this chapter.

¹⁹ The image of hands in one's pockets is a recurring one throughout Kafka, and I will come back to it in my conclusion of the dissertation.

²⁰ Rahmani notes that the position of stoker is "not only labor-intensive, but the kind directly connected with heat. Unlike machinists who toiled behind sanders and cutters but who were otherwise relatively satisfied with their work, heat-reliant labor in the nineteenth century was particularly oppressive and likely to provoke in those who were assigned to it intolerance and rebelliousness" Burrow, "Risk and Insurance in the Writings of Franz Kafka.", 105.

²¹ In 1913, Kafka wrote to Felice Bauer, "daß als Ganzes nur das erste Kapitel aus innerer Wahrheit herkommt", see: Kafka, Briefe 1913-1914, 128.

²² In his capacity as assessor of work-related accident risk, Kafka knew that any space or structure featuring an engine needed to be insured, and that the engine is as such the definition of a modern work space. During his tenure at the AUVa, the status of ships and cars was continuously negotiated in that respect.

²³ Rahmani reads the steamship as an “icon of progress, but also of arrogance and greed,” and as a stage on which industrial conditions are explored: Rahmani, “In the Belly of the Ship: A Demonstration of Machine Power and Labor Relations”, 105

²⁴ It comes as a surprise to Karl even though the scene immediately preceding this underlines the same disproportion and incongruity between physical strength and actual power, focusing on the power that the other side holds at their fingertips, when the “herumfahrenden Hände” of the stoker are compared to the hand of an administrator, who simply has to push a button to put an end to the threat posed by the stoker. While the stoker’s sheer strength has just moments before frightened Karl, he takes comfort in his physical strength nevertheless, until he realizes the power of the opponent’s hand who has electronic tools at his disposal: “Er hätte ihm gern die herumfahrenden Hände aus Furcht vor Schlägen gehalten, noch lieber allerdings ihn in einen Winkel gedrängt um ihm ein paar leise beruhigende Worte zuzuflüstern, die niemand sonst hätte hören müssen. Aber der Heizer war außer Rand und Band. Karl begann jetzt schon sogar aus dem Gedanken eine Art Trost zu schöpfen, daß der Heizer im Notfall mit der Kraft seiner Verzweiflung alle anwesenden sieben Männer bezwingen könne. Allerdings lag auf dem Schreibtisch wie ein Blick dorthin lehrte ein Aufsatz mit viel zu vielen Druckknöpfen der elektrischen Leitung und eine Hand, einfach auf sie niedergedrückt, konnte das ganze Schiff mit allen seinen von feindlichen Menschen gefüllten Gängen rebellisch machen” (30-31).

²⁵ On the experience of senselessness in *Der Verschollene*, see Görner, “Nach dem Sinn. Amerika oder das Selbstverständliche im Absurden.” Görner briefly mentions how gesturs emphasize the lack of sense, or meaning (299), such as in this passage of *Der Verschollene* focusing on Therese “die wie gebannt den Oberkellner anstarrte, und die immer wieder entweder irgendwelche Haare aus der Stirn strich oder diese Handbewegung um ihrer selbst willen machte” (241).

²⁶ On the ambiguity of the narrative perspective in *Der Verschollene*, see: Scheffel, “Paradoxa und kein Ende: Franz Kafkas Romanprojekt ‘Der Verschollene.’”

²⁷ cf Ostermann, “Das Subjekt und die Macht: Kafkas Erzählung *Der Heizer* mit Foucault gelesen” 458-459.

²⁸ On the intertwining of authorial narrator, what the characters tell each other, and indirect discourse, see: Neumann, “The Abandoned Writing Desk: On Kafka’s Metanarratives, as Exemplified by ‘Der Heizer,’” 87–89.

²⁹ Emphasis added.

³⁰ cf Ostermann, “Das Subjekt und die Macht: Kafkas Erzählung *Der Heizer* mit Foucault gelesen.” 459. Ostermann points out that it is the cane of another traveller

that reminds Karl of his forgotten umbrella, which can be added to the list of similarly shaped object.

³¹ Karl is warned by Green about the fact that it was Schubal who has handled the suitcase. "Denn wenn der Schubal seine Hand auf etwas legt, dann ist wenig Hoffnung, daß man es unbeschädigt zurückbekommt" (130).

³² The whole passage varies this idea of a struggle about who gets to handle what: "Karl antwortete nicht, hielt sich aber von nun an mehr an den Irländer, er bat ihn auch ihm jetzt ein wenig den Koffer zu tragen, was dieser nachdem Karl seine Bitte mehrmals wiederholt hatte, auch tat. Nur klagte er ununterbrochen über die Schwere des Koffers, bis es sich zeigte, daß er nur die Absicht hatte, den Koffer um die Veroneser Salami zu erleichtern, die ihm wohl schon im Hotel angenehm aufgefallen war. Karl mußte sie auspacken, der Franzose nahm sie zu sich, um sie mit seinem dolchartigen Messer zu behandeln und fast ganz allein aufzuessen. Robinson bekam nur hie und da eine Schnitte, Karl dagegen, der wieder den Koffer tragen mußte, wenn er ihn nicht auf der Landstraße stehen lassen wollte, bekam nichts, als hätte er seinen Anteil schon im Voraus sich genommen. Es schien ihm zu kleinlich, um ein Stückchen zu betteln, aber die Galle regte sich ihm" (142).

³³ According to Wolf Kittler, the situation described in the opening sentence also contains a barely escaped legal struggle for financial support. cf. Kittler, "Dead Beat Father: Zu Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene*."

³⁴ Karl himself tries a different approach to summarizing his life story, and it includes the use of his hand: "Warum haben Sie denn fahren müssen?" "Ach was!" sagte Karl und warf die ganze Geschichte mit der Hand weg (12). This phrasing echoes an earlier crossed out reference to seeing the statue of liberty and what she holds in her hand: "er verwarf das über sie Gelernte" (Kafka, *Der Verschollene*, Kommentarband, 87.)

³⁵ See Anderson, "The Shadow of the Modern: Gothic Ghosts in Stoker's *Dracula* and Kafka's *Amerika*," 391.

³⁶ The hand as quintessential organ and symbolic figure for work and through work as distinguishing factor of the human is, for example, taken up in a famous passage by Engels that conveys many traditional cultural ideas of the hand's significance for work and human identity, where the hand is described as both origin and product of human work: "So ist die Hand nicht nur das Organ der Arbeit, sie ist auch ihr Produkt. Nur durch Arbeit, durch Anpassung an immer neue Verrichtungen, durch Vererbung der dadurch erworbenen besondern Ausbildung der Muskel, Bänder, und in längeren Zeiträumen auch der Knochen, und durch immer erneuerte Anwendung dieser vererbten Verfeinerung auf neue, stets verwickeltere Verrichtungen hat die Menschenhand jenen hohen Grad von Vollkommenheit erhalten, auf dem sie

Raffaelsche Gemälde, Thorvaldsensche Statuen, Paganinische Musik hervorzaubern konnte." (Engels, *Dialektik der Natur*, 445-446.)

³⁷ Korff, "From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker's Hand," 70.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 77.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Likewise, the voice that is so firm that it could be beaten with a hammer almost parodies a fantasy of sovereignty over production methods, as does Karl's handling of the letter scale and his preoccupation with the manipulation of objects in general.

⁴⁶ This creates an effect of estrangement that conveys Karl's confusion and loss of orientation. Adding to this is the way the trope of the hand is combined with modern aesthetic techniques of de-familiarization, such as zoom, close-up, distortions and almost anticipates the Brechtian gestus of the epic theatre.

⁴⁷ cf. Gosetti-Ferencei, *Exotic Spaces in German Modernism*, 139-140.

⁴⁸ "Denn soweit ich nach Deinen Erzählungen und nach dem, was ich selbst gesehen habe, urteilen kann, ist das hier kein Dienst, sondern eine Sklaverei. Das kann kein Mensch ertragen, das glaube ich Dir" (314-315).

⁴⁹ This is for example the case in a passage where they watch a political rally from the balcony and all three start touching him:

"Und sie überraschte Karl und drehte mit beiden Händen sein Gesicht sich zu, so daß sie ihm in die Augen sah. Es dauerte aber nur einen Augenblick, denn Karl schüttelte gleich ihre Hände ab, und ärgerlich ... suchte er sich nun mit aller Kraft vom Druck Bruneldas zu befreien und sagte:

'Bitte, lassen Sie mich weg.'

'Du wirst bei uns bleiben', sagte Delamarche, ohne den Blick von der Straße zu wenden, und streckte nur eine Hand aus, um Karl am Weggehen zu verhindern.

‘Laß nur’, sagte Brunelda und wehrte die Hand des Delamarche ab, ‘er bleibt ja schon.’ Und sie drückte Karl noch fester ans Geländer, er hätte mit ihr raufen müssen, um sich von ihr zu befreien. Und wenn ihm das auch gelungen wäre, was hätte er damit erreicht. Links von ihm stand Delamarche, rechts hatte sich nun Robinson aufgestellt, er war in einer regelrechten Gefangenschaft.

‘Sei froh, daß man dich nicht hinauswirft’, sagte Robinson und beklopfte Karl mit der Hand, die er unter Bruneldas Arm durchgezogen hatte” (330-331).

⁵⁰ Unlike Karl, Brunelda’s former servants were compensated with money, as is apparent in Robinson’s description of a scene that shows the incestuous mixing of the economic and erotic spheres as Brunelda repeatedly leads Delamarche’s hand to the wallet that is attached to her belt: “Dann hat die Brunelda die Hand des Delamarche zu ihrer Geldtasche hingezogen die sie am Gürtel trug, Delamarche hat hineingegriffen und also angefangen die Diener auszuzahlen, die Brunelda hat sich nur dadurch an der Auszahlung beteiligt, daß sie mit der offenen Geldtasche im Gürtel dabei gestanden ist. Delamarche mußte oft hineingreifen, denn er verteilte das Geld, ohne zu zählen und ohne die Forderungen zu prüfen” (310).

⁵¹ For a similar mixing of literal and figurative meanings in the the Oberportier’s handling of Karl, see also this passage: “Lassen Sie mich”, sagte Karl, seine Neugierde inbetreff der Portierloge war bis zum Übermaß gestillt, “ich will mit Ihnen nichts mehr zu tun haben.” “Das genügt nicht, um fortzukommen”, sagte der Oberportier, drückte Karls Arme, daß dieser sie gar nicht rühren konnte und trug ihn förmlich an das andere Ende der Portiersloge (260).

⁵² For a discussion of the name Negro, see William, “Why Karl Calls Himself ‘Negro’: The Representation of Waiting and the Waited-On in Franz Kafka’s *Der Verschollene*.”

⁵³ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 757.

⁵⁴ Rosa, *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne*, 82.

⁵⁵ Marx and Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*, 468-469.

⁵⁶ Kafka anticipates Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern times*, where the beginning sequence with the assembly line shows the effect of such work on the entire body and psyche of the individual.

⁵⁷ Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History*. 46.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁵⁹ This physical demotion may be reflected in the choice of the hand as political symbol of worker’s issues that I have addressed in the first section.

⁶⁰ Kafka, *Briefe 1913-1914*, 196.

⁶¹ The latest state of the art ten-story industrial dormitories in Gablonz, one of Kafka's districts in his function as risk assessor at the Workmen accident insurance, were nicknamed "die amerikanischen Wolkenkratzer" and were a popular postcard motif (See Wagenbach, *Kafkas Fabriken*, 17). Kafka has Karl imagine "Amerika" as a world without old houses, to a point that any perceived lack of modernity shocks him: "Da gibt es also auch schon in Amerika alte Häuser", sagte Karl. "Natürlich", sagte Klara lachend und zog ihn weiter. "Sie haben merkwürdige Begriffe von Amerika" (88). In order to increase the moment of shock for an adolescent hero from Prague, who is already used to a good amount of everyday mechanization, he is put in a place where he sees the 'new' world (including "real" skyscrapers) through new eyes, and experiences it with increased speed and rhythm.

⁶² Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History*, 5.

⁶³ cf Rahmani, "In the Belly of the Ship: A Demonstration of Machine Power and Labor Relations", 108 and Wagenbach, "Kafkas Fabriken," 29.

⁶⁴ Asendorf, *Ströme und Strahlen. Das langsame Verschwinden der Materie um 1900*, 64. Asendorf also writes about the influence of the telephone and points to the telecommunicator passage in the uncle's factory in *Der Verschollene* (Ibid., 71).

⁶⁵ For example, Taylor instituted the substitution of the foreman with the floor manager, who at the same time was more in the background and also increased surveillance. Rahmani addresses this issue and points to the Heizer's superiors and an example of it (Rahmani, "In the Belly of the Ship," 108), while I focus on the analysis of hand movements.

⁶⁶ Giedeon, *Mechanization Takes Command*, 47.

⁶⁷ Kafka, *Briefe 1914-1917*, 90. Kafka continues, showing his personal involvement: "Ich antwortete natürlich, daß die Leute offenbar mit den Maschinen, die meiner 'Erfahrung' nach ausgezeichnet sind, nicht richtig umzugehen verstehn, daß sie durch irgendeinen tüchtigen Menschen z. B. durch ein Berliner Fräulein, daß ich kenne, unterrichtet werden müßten." (Ibid.)

⁶⁸ Gütling, "Beiträge zur Unfallversicherung und Unfallstatistik", 289. Cf Wagner, *Historical Background*, in Corngold et al., *Franz Kafka: The Office Writings*, 40-41.

⁶⁹ Gütling, "Beiträge zur Unfallversicherung und Unfallstatistik", 290-2.

⁷⁰ Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, 238.

⁷¹ Ibid., 243.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Münsterberg applied psychological research to the field of industrial work and is one of the main representatives of “Psychotechnik” who in 1910 returned to Berlin after almost two decades at Harvard University.

⁷⁴ Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, 225

⁷⁵ Ibid., 254.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 256.

⁷⁷ Eugene Fourniere, in *Revue Socialiste*, cited in Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity*, 242.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 257-258.

⁷⁹ Stach, Kafka: *Die Jahre Der Entscheidungen*, 198.

⁸⁰ Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka*, 115. Critics have contested the accuracy of Janouchs account (relating conversations with Kafka from 1920-1921), which was first published in 1951 and expanded in 1968, many years later and hence unreliable. But this passage is such a strong condemnation of Taylorism that even if it is embellished or exaggerated, it still shows an important tendency in Kafka’s perception of this issue. On the reception of Janouchs account, see *Tuckerova, Reading Kafka in Prague: The Reception of Franz Kafka between the East and the West during the Cold War*, 79-136.

⁸¹ See for example Plachta, “Der Heizer/Der Verschollene,” 445.

⁸² Frantisek Soukoup, another source for Kafka, also had a strong socialist affiliation (see Plachta, “Der Heizer/Der Verschollene,” 446).

⁸³ While the social criticism of Holitscher’s book, including the depiction of industrial labor and capitalism, is well established (see for example Fingerhut, “Erlebtes und Erlesenes”), Holitscher has not been linked to a depiction of Taylorism in *Der Verschollene*. Klaus Wagenbach, and others since him, have linked a factory scene in Holitscher with Kafka’s texts (Wagenbach, compares the passage with the needle that could at any moment stick the finger, which I will quote below, with “In der Strafkolonie,” as well as with the telecommunicator passage in *Der Verschollene*, but does not quote the phrase with the twitching hand). (Wagenbach, “Kafkas Fabriken,” 38.) But the explicit descriptions of Taylorism and its effect on society, as well as the focus on hands, and the importance of those issues for *Der Verschollene* haven’t been addressed in any detail.

⁸⁴ Holitscher, *Amerika: heute und morgen*, 314-315. Kafka owned a copy of the book. Holitscher's account was serialized in the "Neue Rundschau" before its publication in 1912, and Kafka likely also read it there.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 314.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 315.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 307.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 307-308.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 313.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 307.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² If dissimulating the biographical connection was a motivation for Kafka it was successful, since readings of *Der Verschollene* that focus on it are still the exception rather than the rule. I will address this connection at the end of this chapter and more fully in the next chapter.

⁹³ It is often pointed out that *Amerika* is not a realistic depiction, cf. Fuchs, "A Psychoanalytic Reading of The Man Who Disappeared"; Simons, "'Amerika gibt es nicht': On the Semiotics of Literary America in the Twentieth Century"; Heimböckel, "'Amerika im Kopf': Franz Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene* und der Amerika-Diskurs seiner Zeit"; Anderson, "Kafka and New York: Notes on a Traveling Narrative"; Janz, "Von Prag nach New York? Zu Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene*," and Jahraus, *Kafka. Leben, Schreiben, Machtapparate*, 262-5. Mark Anderson points to Kafka's "ambiguous, contradictory, antimimetic gestures" in Kafka's *Amerika* (148). On the semiotic challenges of America in *Der Verschollene*, Oliver Simons notes that "Kafka describes America as a poetological concept in which the authenticity of the sign is permanently questioned" and "deals with displacement of meaning and signifiers which no longer refer to something real" (208). Janz comes to this conclusion: "Amerika? Im Grunde verlässt Karl Prag nicht, er war nie da, und er kommt auch nicht in New York an, sondern in einer imaginären Stadt, die als ein Experimentierfeld angelegt ist, in dem sich die Prozesse der Technisierung, der Beschleunigung und Ökonomisierung umso genauer beobachten lassen. So gesehen skizziert Kafkas Roman denn doch 'das allermodernste New York'" (64). Oliver Jahraus points out that *Amerika* is not only "Handlungsort . . . sondern stellt auch einen ideologischen Ort dar" (263-4).

⁹⁴ Grimm's *Deutsches Wörterbuch* defines *Handlanger* as "der handreichung thut, helfer". For a summary of the examples in Grimm see Klenner, "Vermieter des

Intellekts", 63: "The majorities of the examples, which date back to the fifteenth century, are related to petty manual labor and distasteful or underhanded tasks."

⁹⁵ Typing hands were, like the hand in industrial production, the object of careful study in order to increase productivity. See Kammer, "Graphologie, Schreibmaschine und die Ambivalenz der Hand. Paradigmen des Schreibens um 1900," 133-142.

⁹⁶ Emphasis added.

⁹⁷ Emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Emphasis added.

⁹⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁰ Gerhard Kurz points out that the accident may in certain passages also be read as a suicide, while the child sees it as an accident. But even as a suicide, it is closely related to the social and economic conditions and thus equally work-induced. See Kurz, "Therese's Story in *Der Verschollene*," 102.

¹⁰¹ Therese is first introduced as "achtzehn," (180) but becomes younger in the course of the story because she is referred to as "etwa fünf Jahre alt" (196) before the narrator mentions that the story happened ten years ago (202).

¹⁰² It can also be read as a literary allusion to another story within a story. If *Der Verschollene* is Kafka's Dickensroman, the story of Therese is a miniature Dostoyevsky novel within it. Therese and her mother rushing through the streets recalls Crime and Punishment's Katarina Ivanovna Marmeladova and her daughter, Sonia, in that they have an extra story within the main plot that shows the worst social and economical conditions for the most sympathetic characters. The passage can thus be understood as a direct reference to another social critique and to the use of a sympathetic character within a story of a more ambivalent character.

¹⁰³ Karl contemplates the waste of space: "Es war eine Raumverschwendung sondergleichen und Karl dachte an die östlichen Newyorker Quartiere, die ihm der Onkel zu zeigen versprochen hatte, wo angeblich in einem kleinen Zimmer mehrere Familien wohnten und das Heim einer Familie in einem Zimmerwinkel bestand, in dem sich die Kinder um ihre Eltern scharten. Und hier standen so viele Zimmer leer und waren nur dazu da, um hohl zu klingen, wenn man an die Türe schlug." (97) Here, Karl's reaction to being lost on the ship to randomly knock at the Heizer's door is mirrored by his being lost in the house, and Therese's story includes this motif as well (Therese and her mother "klopfen wahllos an Türen").

¹⁰⁴ Kittler lays out the details and potential legal consequences of Karl's abandonment of his son in Kittler, "Dead Beat Father: Zu Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene*."

¹⁰⁵ Kurz, "Therese's Story in *Der Verschollene*," 106.

¹⁰⁶ See Jahn, *Kafkas Roman "Der Verschollene" ("Amerika")*, 48, where Jahn also points to this parallel.

¹⁰⁷ Wagner, "Poseidons Gehilfe," 120. Wagner points to Therese's mother as an example of a statistical view of the worker that Kafka knew from his work at the Accident Insurance Institute. I will come back to Wagner's treatment of statistics in my next chapter. At the same time, as Wagner points out, Therese's mother is depicted as an individual, opposing the statistical insurance worldview. (Ibid., 122.)

¹⁰⁸ Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 107-138. For more detailed readings of this text, see Heinemann, "The Rhetoric of Kafka's *Amtliche Schriften*" and North, "Toward a Kafka Politics: An Accidental Collective." Klaus Wagenbach briefly links Therese's story with Kafka's insurance text (see "Kafkas Fabriken," 37-38), as does Steel Burrow (see *Risk and Insurance*, 85). Wolf Kittler points to the fact that Therese's mother as "Handlangerin" would not have been covered by accident insurance whereas Therese's father, a "Baupolier" would have been covered, however without referring to this or any other specific office text. See Kittler, "Dead Beat Father: Zu Kafkas Roman *Der Verschollene*," 172. Benno Wagner links Therese's story with the general Accident Insurance context, and mentions connections between the story and a law from 1907 "Regelungen in der Schutzvorschrift für Hochbauten". See Wagner, "Poseidons Gehilfe," 121.

¹⁰⁹ Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 107.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 136.

¹¹³ Throughout *Der Verschollene*, there are allusions to Kafka's work at the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institute. During the negotiations in the captain's office, the "Lohnlisten"—one of the main tools for determining businesses' insurance premiums—are mentioned. Likewise, the Heizraum and the elevator are settings that for Kafka would have been linked closely to the insurance work, because any structure containing an engine meant mandatory insurance.

¹¹⁴ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 597-8.

¹¹⁵ Kafka, *Der Verschollene*, 201.

¹¹⁶ See Brod, "Neben dem Schriftstellerberuf. Ein Zyklus Selbstbiographien. Franz Kafka und Max Brod in ihren Doppelberufen."

¹¹⁷ See Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, 64-67, and *Franz Kafka. In der Strafkolonie*. Eine Geschichte aus dem Jahre 1914, 73-77.

¹¹⁸ See Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 833-835 and Corngold et al., *Office Writings*, 116-119; see also Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung," 66-67.

¹¹⁹ For other texts that briefly refer to Kafka's "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen," see: Karl, *Franz Kafka. Representative Man*, 223; Gross, "Kafka's Short Prose", 81; and Fuller, "A Normal Enough Dog: Kafka and the Office," 194. The same, particularly "literary" passage (that I will also address) is quoted in all these texts, as an example of the style of Kafka's office writings, but none of these publications consider the text as a whole. I will come back to this in my analysis of the text.

¹²⁰ For detailed analyses of other individual office writings, see Greenberg, "The Trial in the Stone Quarry"; Heinemann, "The Rhetoric of Kafka's *Amtliche Schriften*"; and North, "Toward a Kafka Politics: An Accidental Collective."

¹²¹ Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung," 23. The editors make this statement in the context of determining Kafka's authorship of unsigned texts, but the issue of style matters beyond this question of authorship, because of Kafka's function as designated author for sensitive issues that the authors point out elsewhere. On the challenges of establishing authorship, see also Wagner, "'Beglaubigungssorgen': Zur Problematik von Verfasserschaft, Autorenschaft und Werkintegration im Rahmen der Amtlichen Schriften Franz Kafkas."

¹²² While Kafka's work at the AUVA is well researched, readings that illustrate the specific influence of the insurance background on the literary texts are a relatively recent trend in Kafka scholarship. In this chapter, I will rely especially on Benno Wagner's research, which highlights the tension between conflicting views of the subject by pointing out the anonymous statistical worldview of the insurance that he confronts with a different, more personal view in Kafka's literary text, in what he calls "doppelte Buchführung" (Wagner, "Poseidons Gehilfe. Kafka und die Statistik", 109). For an overview on this insurance focus, see Balke, Vogl, and Wagner, *Für Alle und Keinen: Lektüre, Schrift und Leben bei Nietzsche und Kafka*, and Corngold and Wagner, *Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine*. Despite some overlap, this insurance-specific focus is different from readings that focus on law or bureaucracy in Kafka that I won't address specifically. For the focus on law, see Banakar, "In Search of Heimat: A Note on Franz Kafka's Concept of Law." On bureaucracy, see Heinemann, "Kafka's Oath of Service: 'Der Bau' and the Dialectic of Bureaucratic Mind"; Derlien, "Bureaucracy in Art and Analysis: Kafka and Weber"; and Warner, "Kafka, Weber and Organization Theory."

¹²³ The institute was "halbstaatlich" because it "operated in the private realm but was financially and legally sponsored by the Austrian state"; it was "subject to the

directives of the interior ministry in Vienna” but also had its own board of directors (See Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 23).

¹²⁴ Greenberg, “From Kafka to Kafkaesque” in Corngold et al., *Office Writings*, 355.

¹²⁵ Apart from accidents that were directly connected to work around steam technology, such as explosions, steam technology had also led to geographical, demographic, and other changes that were conducive to accidents with higher casualties: Increased productivity and independence from natural resources led to an increase in the pace of production as well as to a disruption of physical regeneration. With bright light available all night, sleep becomes a scarce resource. Work exhaustion became a phenomenon of new intensity. Another problem was the concentration of all machines and workers around the source of energy, so that an exploding steam boiler threatened a much larger number of people. Similarly, trains abounded in industrial centers so that accidents had a much higher destructive potential. (See Lehner, “Die moderne Unfallversicherung in Österreich. Ein geschichtlicher Rückblick,” 98-99.)

¹²⁶ Ibid., 98.

¹²⁷ Kafka, *Der Verschollene*, 201.

¹²⁸ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 2.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 2 (italics in original).

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid., 4-5.

¹³³ Ibid., 4.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 5. See also Andriopoulos, “Unfall und Verbrechen: Konfigurationen zwischen juristischem und literarischem Diskurs um 1900,” 122–123.

¹³⁵ Rabinbach, “Social Knowledge, Social Risk, and the Politics of Industrial Accidents in Germany and France,” 52.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 2.

¹³⁸ Rabinbach, “Social Knowledge,” 53.

¹³⁹ Benno Wagner notes “dass der Arbeitsunfall, jenes aus der Sicht des betroffenen Individuums und nach seiner juristischen Definition noch zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts plötzliche gewaltsame und unfreiwillige Schadensereignis, als regelmäßige Funktion der friedlichen wirtschaftlichen Tätigkeit der Gesellschaft wahrnehmbar wurde, wenn man ihn nicht als Einzelfall sondern in seiner Häufung und Verteilung über die Zeit, also als statistisches und probabilistisches Phänomen betrachtete” (Wagner, “Kafkas phantastisches Büro,” 106).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 107

¹⁴¹ Rabinbach, “Social Knowledge,” 53-54.

¹⁴² One direct aspect of political control was that in addressing social questions, the motivation of the state was to an extent the control of discontented workers who were increasingly efficient in their organization, and the control of the Social Democrats as political opponents that had made the important and pressing issue of social questions their agenda. In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm I explicitly presented a crucial law preceding the founding of social insurance partly as a co-opting of the opponent’s cause: “daß die Heilung der sozialen Schäden nicht ausschließlich im Wege der Repression socialdemokratischer Ausschreitungen, sondern gleichmäßig auf dem der positiven Förderung des Wohles der Arbeiter zu suchen sein werde” (Hermsdorf, “Arbeit und Amt als Erfahrung und Gestaltung,” 30). See also North, “Toward a Kafka Politics: An Accidental Collective,” 89: “Intended to dampen revolutionary action by preempting citizen’s demands, it can be seen as insurance first and foremost for and of the state.” But the intervention of the state has effects that go further than the political control of the opponent.

¹⁴³ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 48.

¹⁴⁴ Wagner, “Kafkas phantastisches Büro”, 105.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 110. For other interpretations that read Kafka in the context of biopolitics, see Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 43-44; For connections of biopolitics to literary texts, especially *Der Proceß* and *Das Schloß*, see Vogl, “Lebende Anstalt.” On traces of biopolitics in the diary writings, especially passages that deal with the observation of his own body, see Balke, “Die Kraft des Minimum”.

¹⁴⁶ Dotzler, “Archäologie der Bio-Informatik”, 58. Dotzler defines bio-power in terms of societal transformation: “Die Bio-Macht ist danach als Transformation der vorgängigen Souveränitätsgesellschaften in Disziplinargesellschaften zu begreifen, die je näher man sich der Gegenwart nähert zu Kontrollgesellschaften geraten” (58). In his analysis of “Der Heizer,” Eberhard Ostermann links Karl’s uncle, who appears throughout the first chapter depicted as handling a bamboo stick that is also likened to a sword with specifically such a transformation, from a sovereign society that holds threatens with death (sword) to a disciplinary society (bamboo stick).

(Ostermann, "Das Subjekt und die Macht: Kafkas Erzählung Der Heizer mit Foucault gelesen," 458-9). Vogl makes a similar, but modified observation: "Wenn in den Romanen Kafkas Institutionen an die Stelle der (auto)biographischen Perspektive treten und erzählerisch die Lebensbeschreibung kassieren, so ist die allerdings auch mit einem veränderten institutionellen Format verknüpft. Diese Wendung scheint die notorische Beobachtung von Gilles Deleuze zu bestätigen, der in Kafkas Literatur einen Übergang von den Gestalten einer älteren Disziplinarmacht zu den Formen einer neuen Kontrollmacht erkennt, einen Übergang, der wohl einige Konsequenzen für die biopolitische Erfassung und Verwaltung des Lebens wie für das literarische Schreibprojekt und die Frage der Gattung besitzt" (Vogl, "Lebende Anstalt" 24-25).

¹⁴⁷ Dotzler, "Archäologie der Bio-Informatik," 58.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴⁹ cf. Dotzler "Archäologie der Bio-Informatik," 59 and Corngold et al., commentary 6 to *Office Writings*, 118.

¹⁵⁰ Corngold et al., commentary 6 to *Office Writings*, 118.

¹⁵¹ Wagner, "Kafkas phantastisches Büro," 107. On the influence of Quételét on Kafka's literary writing, see also Corngold and Wagner, *Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine*, 35-55.

¹⁵² Rabinbach, "Social Knowledge," 52.

¹⁵³ Rabinbach, "Social Knowledge," 53.

¹⁵⁴ On simulation in Kafka see: Zilcosky, "Kafka's Poetics of Indeterminacy: On Trauma, Hysteria, and Simulation at the Fin de Siècle," and Corngold and Wagner, *Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine*, 209-213.

¹⁵⁵ Ewald "Insurance and Risk," 208.

¹⁵⁶ Wagner, "Kafkas phantastisches Büro," 106.

¹⁵⁷ As the social state's modern worker's occupational risk taken to the extreme, even Josef K.'s death in a stone quarry could be read as the state-sanctioned and -justified condemnation to a "normal" risk of death, especially considering that in his professional capacity at the AUVA, Kafka wrote repeatedly about deaths in quarries and fought for strategies to avoid these preventable deaths. On Kafka's professional writings on the subject of stone quarries, see Greenberg, "The Trial in the Stone Quarry." I will come back to this in my next chapter.

¹⁵⁸ Wasserman, "Changing Minds, Saving Lives: Franz Kafka as a Key Industrial Reformer," 480. See also Rabinbach, "Social Knowledge," 65: "The Kongress über

Unfallschutz und Unfallversicherung held in Vienna in 1913 was an international gathering of the creme of insurance specialists, among them the thirty-year-old Franz Kafka, whose professional writings had already distinguished him as one of the most promising young Czech experts."

¹⁵⁹ See Brod, "Neben dem Schriftstellerberuf. Ein Zyklus Selbstbiographien. Franz Kafka und Max Brod in ihren Doppelberufen," 4.

¹⁶⁰ Gross, "Kafka's Short Fiction", 83 (*italics in original*).

¹⁶¹ Corngold, "Kafka and the Ministry of Writing," 3 (*italics in original*).

¹⁶² Corngold et al., preface to *Office Writings*, x.

¹⁶³ See Koch, "Dichtung und Arbeit. Interferenzen in den Texten Franz Kafkas," 139-140.

¹⁶⁴ Kafka, *Briefe 1900-1912*, 294.

¹⁶⁵ Wagenbach, "Kafkas Fabriken", 15.

¹⁶⁶ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 91.

¹⁶⁷ On such interpretations in the context of Kafka's first text on construction sites, see Heinemann, "The Rhetoric of Kafka's Amtliche Schriften," 29-30, and Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 87-88.

¹⁶⁸ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 78.

¹⁶⁹ Another act of balance was that between the private sector and the state, which funded the expensive enterprise of accident insurance. Cf. Alt, *Franz Kafka. Der ewige Sohn*, 173.

¹⁷⁰ Kafka, *Briefe 1900-1912*, 108.

¹⁷¹ These reports were particularly crucial in the first years of Kafka's tenure, when insurance employees were not yet allowed to visit factories for the purpose of categorizing them and were almost exclusively relying on these reports. For examples and the importance of the trade inspector's reports see Jahnke, "Der Beamte Franz Kafka und die k. k. Gewerbeinspektoren: Ein Beitrag zur Rekonstruktion der beruflichen Erfahrungen Kafkas im Hinblick auf den industriellen Arbeitsalltag," 24.

¹⁷² Hermsdorf, "Franz Kafka und die Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt," 43.

¹⁷³ Throughout Kafka's office writings, the hand also appears as a rhetorical figure. Of course, the German language is very rich in hand-related idiomatic expressions,

but Kafka uses such hand images consciously and consistently in situations where the individual fate and that of a larger social collective are interrelated. In Kafka's writings within all three areas of his expertise (accident prevention, risk classification, and later war-related injuries that I will discuss in the fourth chapter), hand idioms appear in such contexts. For example, an article on the topic of employers who falsify risk classification parameters to save insurance contributions uses the hand as a recurring motif. The piece, entitled "Die Arbeiterunfallversicherung und die Unternehmer," which appeared in the newspaper Tetschen-Bodenbacher Zeitung, negotiates these interests of conflict between the business owners and the AUVA. In the artfully constructed article that Kafka acknowledges in the diaries ("einen sophistischen Artikel für und gegen die Anstalt in die Tetschner-Bodenbacher Zeitung geschrieben" [Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 73]) and that the editors of the *Office Writings* call a "jewel among Kafka's office writings" (Corngold et al., commentary 8 to *Office Writings*, 145), Kafka uses the hand as recurring motif for social responsibility and potential for reconciliation. The article describes the financial problems of the AUVA, which are connected to fraudulent behavior that leads businesses to pay lower premiums than necessary. He summarizes the AUVA's criticism and shifts the responsibility to the business owners: "Uns handelte es sich nur darum, festzustellen, welches die Hauptfaktoren waren, welche die Defizite der Anstalt bewirkten und deren Beeinflussung in die Hand der Unternehmer gegeben ist." (Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 263.) He argues that the businesses' own complaints should be substituted through action, "durch eine tüchtige Realpolitik der Unternehmer selbst zu ersetzen und dort Hand anzulegen, wo es die Tatsachen befehlen." (Ibid., 265-266). The article concludes by making the goal a common one, and by again requesting responsible action through hand imagery: "Dies alles ist sicher kein kleines Programm und die neue Arbeitsleistung, die die Anstalt auf sich nimmt, ist sicher keine kleine. Deshalb glauben wir, daß die Unternehmer auch in dieser Beziehung die ihnen hier dargebotene Hand ergreifen sollen." (Ibid., 267-268.) Such hand imagery in contexts that suggest social debt not only of the workers to society but also from society to the workers is also found in other publications. An example within the realm of accident prevention comes from the yearly report for 1910 (a follow-up text to the essay examined in the next section). After sharply criticizing the businesses for their lack of interest and initiative in accident prevention, Kafka uses the hand to show the common goal and overcome adversity: "Es ist dabei notwendig, daß alle, welche ein Interesse an der Unfallverhütung haben: Betriebsunternehmer, Versicherte, Gewerbeinspektorate und die Anstalten selbst, tunlichst einander in die Hände arbeiten." (Ibid., 227.) Other examples from public calls for donations during the war where the hand imagery will be particularly explicit and relevant will be included in the fourth chapter.

¹⁷⁴ cf. Corngold et al., commentary 6 to *Office Writings*, 116: "The deplorable state of workplace safety in Kafka's days was partly due to the fact that the issue of accident prevention was a football between parties to the political conflict over social insurance as a whole."

¹⁷⁵ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 80; See also Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung," 65.

¹⁷⁶ Kafka came back to this issue in the following years as well, and he explicitly used the report analyzed here as an example of a successful implementation of accident prevention. In the report for the year 1910 (written in 1911), this leads him to the programmatic promise, "die Ausbreitung guter Schutzkategorien in allen Bereichen zu fördern" (Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 226).

¹⁷⁷ The influence and career of this text survived Kafka by decades, and it was included in an anniversary issue of the AUVA.

¹⁷⁸ Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Kommentar," 834.

¹⁷⁹ Wagner, "Historical Background" in Corngold et al., *Office Writings*, 40.

¹⁸⁰ "Zu der bereits im vorjährigen Berichte zur Darstellung gebrachten Aktion betreffend die Einführung von runden Sicherheitswellen ... beehrt sich die Anstalt folgende Mitteilungen zu machen" (Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 194).

¹⁸¹ When using the English translation of technical terms, I am referring to the translation by Eric Patton and Ruth Hein in Corngold et al., "Measures for Preventing Accidents from Wood-Planing Machines" in *Office Writings*, 109-115.

¹⁸² See Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung," 35. Furthermore, "the essay shows Kafka to be an expert in social mechanics as well" (Corngold et al., commentary 6 to *Office Writings*, 116).

¹⁸³ This and all following quotations in parentheses within the text refer to "Unfallverhütungsmaßregel bei Holzhobelmaschinen" in Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 194-201.

¹⁸⁴ Corngold et al., commentary 6 to *Office Writings*, 116. The AUVA is here following the German example, where insurances were already using illustrations, even films.

¹⁸⁵ Klaus Hermsdorf writes that this innovation "bedeute einen kleinen, aber doch bemerkenswerten Paradigmenwechsel - die Ergänzung der tabellarisierten Statistik durch Visualisierung, einen Übergang vom abstrakten Zahlenwert zu den Suggestivkräften des Bildes" (Hermsdorf, "Franz Kafka und die Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt", 62.

¹⁸⁶ Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung", 66.

¹⁸⁷ Hermsdorf and Wagner call it "die bahnbrechende mediale Erweiterung des Wahrnehmungsapparates der AUVA" ("Kommentar" in Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 877.

¹⁸⁸ Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung," 66.

¹⁸⁹ The fact that Kafka was the author of the text is uncontested, even though the report is not signed with his name. In addition to the letter to Felice quoted above, where he refers to the text as his own contribution, the editors of Kafka's *Amtliche Schriften* also point to Max Brod's recollection that it was authored by Kafka (Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Kommentar", in Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 832). While Kafka includes the illustrations in his "offer" to Felice, it is not clear from this whether Kafka created the illustrations. I have not found any source that claims a different artist, but also no proof for definitive creation of the illustrations by Kafka himself. There seems to be a kind of unspoken consensus that they are Kafka's own drawings. However, even if they were not Kafka's, it can be assumed that he had control over what they depicted and how he integrated them in his text.

¹⁹⁰ "Blick" also sets the scene for the "visual" argumentation through the illustrations.

¹⁹¹ Here, Kafka seems to be drawing on the assumption that a person's desire for moral integrity will lead to a state that benefits all people, while describing the natural change toward the safety feature that "will have occurred" as regulated through the market, and not through intervention of the social state. In the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith describes the need to conceive of oneself as a person of moral integrity as exactly such a self-regulatory function of the market (coincidentally using the figure of the invisible hand in this context as image of this self regulation). In this sense, Kafka here seems to hide the invisible hand of the ghostwriter behind the invisible hand of the market.

¹⁹² This effect is also achieved by the semantic relatedness between "hervortreten" and "auftreten."

¹⁹³ Corngold et al., "Measures for Preventing Accidents from Wood-Planing Machines" in *Office Writings*, 110.

¹⁹⁴ Wagenbach, "Kafkas Fabriken", 21. For the article in the *Gablonzer Zeitung* from Oct. 2, 1910 see *Ibid.*, 18-22.

¹⁹⁵ None of the critics address or analyze the text as a whole, but rather use this isolated passage as an example of Kafka's office writings. For instance, Roy Fuller uses this passage as an example of Kafka's use of literary language in his office writings: "One need only instance the phrase somewhat over-violent for the context ('hurled back'); the technical process apparently clearly described but remaining enigmatic; the presentation of the recalcitrance of the material world; the constant alternatives in happenings or causes." (Fuller, "A Normal Enough Dog: Kafka and the Office," 194.) Frederick Karl also picks this passage as an example of the style in Kafka's office writings, with a different assessment, but likewise comparing it to his

literary texts: "While his writing for the institute was not 'creative,' a few specimens reveal he took great care with his prose and that it was both concise and precise. There is to it a hard economical edge, the distinctive voice of his fictional efforts, and also a logic to it, so that one finds, sentence to sentence, an almost obsessive clarity" (Karl, *Franz Kafka. Representative Man*, 223). Ruth Gross also quotes this passage as an example of the literary style of Kafka's office writings. See Gross, "Kafka's short fiction", 81. Richard Heinemann quotes this specific passage as an example for Kafka's accident prevention texts, see Heinemann, "The Rhetoric of Kafka's Amtliche Schriften," 35 (footnote 7). Klaus Wagenbach also uses this passage as an example for Kafka's efforts in accident prevention in "Kafkas Fabriken", 34.

¹⁹⁶ Whereas here, the purpose is to emphasize the concrete effect, the later essay will focus on the more general issue of accident prevention through making small changes, and limits itself to showing the devices, focusing on easy implementation and protective qualities rather than the shock in the display of the "Nichtverwendung".

¹⁹⁷ At the same time, even in this multiplicity, the rows of both the mutilated and lightly injured hands also show a serialized version of individuality, since each hand has distinctive lifelines, a highly personalized detail.

¹⁹⁸ See Karl, *Franz Kafka. Representative Man*, 223: "Kafka might have added other incidents: the amputation of entire hands at the wrist or even higher, with severing of veins and arteries, severe blood loss, and even death without quick attention to the accident victim."

¹⁹⁹ For examples of such anonymous facts and figures in the use of accident lists and counting forms, see Corngold and Wagner, [chapter 9] *The Ghosts in the Machine*, 188-194, "the event of the accident is represented solely as a number and a date" 188 See also "When work-related injuries are considered as professional risks, insurance payments do not cover the loss of a person . . . or a body part, a limb or an organ, in the case of injuries; they cover merely the loss of earning power the worker suffers from such an accident. (Ibid., 206).

²⁰⁰ Rabinach describes how at the end of the nineteenth century, museums of "industrial hygiene" were set up in major European cities (like Vienna in 1890), and he refers to a permanent exhibition of the "Berlin Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft" (AEG), which "set up a permanent display of photographs of dismembered limbs, with the skeleton of a severed hand prominently featured" (Rabinach, "Social Knowledge", 65). Kafka attended international congresses and helped organize exhibitions on workplace safety. Since Marschner borrowed materials from the AEG's permanent exhibition on worker's welfare in Berlin (cf. Wagner, "Historical Background," 40), Kafka may have been familiar with this and similar displays of dismembered hands. In these contexts, the function of the hand is

similar to the hands that Kafka shows in his report since these hands contain cautionary, maybe even accusatory, potential as well.

²⁰¹ Walter Benjamin, *Über Kafka*, 18. cf. Adorno's description of "in den Gesten sedimentierten Erfahrungen" (Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka" 255). Of course, in the report, this close examination of hands is warranted by the subject matter, but Kafka takes this staging of the near-personified hands to an extreme, as I have shown. For a semi-literary accident narrative where a car/tricycle accident is reenacted through hand gestures, see Kafka's Paris travel diary (Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 1012-7. See also Simons, "Schuld und Scham: Kafkas episches Theater," and Corngold and Wagner, *The Ghosts in the Machine*, 177-202.

²⁰² Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka. In der Strafkolonie. Eine Geschichte aus dem Jahre 1914*, 73-78.

²⁰³ Corngold et al., commentary 6 to *Office Writings*, 118.

²⁰⁴ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 597-8.

²⁰⁵ The text carefully develops this tension between the abstract and the concrete, theory and practice. The sentence about Konstruktionen, which in relation to the previous sentence is understood in its figurative sense of mental constructions, suddenly becomes semi-material, between imagination, and as part of the more or less conventional allegory of a knowledge-related water metaphor. The third sentence introduces the Zauberhand, a neologism you'd expect to find in, say, Eichendorf, rather than Kafka, and that, especially in the context of the preceding sentence, evokes romantic tropes of the human quest for knowledge before ending in the graphic image of a hand being ripped apart by a machine.

²⁰⁶ Kafka, *Briefe 1900-1912*, 348.

²⁰⁷ Kafka, *Der Proceß*, 308. All page numbers within the text refer to *Der Proceß*.

²⁰⁸ I will briefly discuss Benjamin's notion of gesture in the first section of this chapter. On Benjamin and gesture in Kafka, see Schiffermüller, *Franz Kafkas Gesten*, 21-40; Locher, *Der Schatten der Hand*, 65-143; and Weber, "Going along for the Ride: Violence and Gesture: Agamben Reading Benjamin Reading Kafka Reading Cervantes."

²⁰⁹ This is true for both older and newer research. Karl Kuepper's 1970 article "Gesture and Posture as Elemental Symbolism in Kafka's *The Trial*" sees in K.'s "inability to make sensible movements" a reflection of "K.s predicament in the trial" (152). Hartmut Binder, in his 1976 study *Kafka in neuer Sicht*, analyzes gestures in *Der Proceß* before the backdrop of Kafka's real-life relationships (see 149-162). He also includes a general chapter on a typology of hand gestures (241-261), mostly from letters and diaries, where he reads hand gestures as "Indiz für die innere

Verfassung einer Beobachteten Person" (240), "Bedeutungsträger" (241), and "Ausdrucksträger seelischer Gehalte" (249). Another closer focus on hands is found in Philip Grundlehner's 1982 article "Manual Gesture in Kafka's Prozeß," which determines that K.'s "most urgent task . . . has been to decipher the etiquette of his opponents' hands in an attempt to emancipate himself from their grasp" (194). Joan Ramon Resina's 1988 article "Gesture: Kafka's means to Silence" reads gestures as "a declaration of the split between bodily behavior and its control by the mind" (19). Elsa Marsot, in her 1997 article "La main et l'esthétique du geste chez Kafka" focuses on an "esthétique du pouvoir" within the text (22). Like Grundlehner, Marsot also notices an ambiguity of signs, but is somewhat more optimistic about K.'s ability to read them (23). Klaus Mladek's "Radical Play: Gesture, Performance, and the Theatrical Logic of the Law in Kafka" from 2003 focuses on the theater and the theatrical, which is an aspect that I discuss in my second section (see also Puchner's articles below). Isolde Schiffermüller, in *Franz Kafka's Gesten* from 2011, presents gestures as "Indizien eines Ausnahmezustands; sie erzählen von der Verhaftung in der Sphäre des Gerichts . . . das nichts mehr vorschreibt und nichts mehr bedeutet, das sich nur noch an den Wirkungen und Deformationen ablesen lässt, die es der menschlichen Haltung und Mimik auferlegt" (16). On gesture in texts other than *Der Proceß*, see Kerckhoff, "Interpreting and Translating Gestures for Power Play in Kafka's 'In the penal Colony'"; Sternstein, "Laughter, Gesture, and Flesh: Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony'"; and Häntzschel, "Zu den Gebärden in Franz Kafkas Erzählung Das Urteil." Martin Puchner's "Reading the Sirens' Gestures" focuses on the influence of the Yiddish theater for Kafka's gestures, and Puchner's "Kafka's Antitheatrical Gestures" explores Kafka's relationship to theater and the dramatic genre, a context that I will come back to towards the end of my second section.

²¹⁰ One exception is Annie Ring's 2012 article "In the Law's Hands: S/M Pleasure in *Der Proceß*, a Queer Reading" which provides a crucial link of gesture with tactile experiences, though in a very different context from my reading. Ring uses queer theory to focus on erotic relationships and sadomasochism. She includes Kafka's drawings of black silhouettes with white hands, and also Kafka's drawings from the accident prevention text discussed in the last chapter (though without making any connection to the theme of the text or accident insurance), which I will come back to towards the end of this chapter.

²¹¹ Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, 369.

²¹² Ibid., 216. For a reading of *Der Proceß* with Simmel's theories, see Svenmo, *Just a Business Deal. Kafka, Strindberg, and the Discourse of Economy*, 143-196.

²¹³ See Kittler, "Heimlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit: Das österreichische Strafprozessrecht in Franz Kafkas Roman *Der Proceß*."

²¹⁴ Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 189. Other research points more generally to the importance of "institutions" in Kafka, and specifically *Der Proceß*. For the theme of

the institution, see Campe, "Kafkas Institutionenroman. *Der Proceß, Das Schloß*." Campe points out "daß K.'s Leben ein einziges institutionelles Faktum ist" (198). In his article "Lebende Anstalt," Josef Vogl establishes a link between certain aspects of *Der Proceß* and administrative and bureaucratic organizations through an analysis of the "Ununterscheidbarkeit von Verwaltungs – und Lebensereignissen" (32). See also Höcker and Simons, *Kafkas Institutionen*; Garloff, "Institutionen des Rechts in Kafkas nicht-amtlichen Schriften" and Robertson, "Kafka, Goffman, and the Total Institution."

²¹⁵ Titorelli claims, "daß mir niemand meine Stellung streitig machen könnte": "'Das ist beneidenswert', sagte K., der an seine Stellung in der Bank dachte, 'Ihre Stellung ist also unerschütterlich?' 'Ja unerschütterlich', sagte der Maler und hob stolz die Achseln" (204).

²¹⁶ The manufacturer "erklärte verschiedene Posten, verbesserte einen kleinen Rechenfehler, der ihm sogar bei diesem flüchtigen Überblick aufgefallen war, erinnerte K. an ein ähnliches Geschäft, das er mit ihm vor etwa einem Jahr abgeschlossen hatte, erwähnte nebenbei, daß sich diesmal eine andere Bank unter größten Opfern um das Geschäft bewerbe" (172).

²¹⁷ See Densky, "Proxies in Kafka: Koncipist FK and Prokurist Josef K.": "The 'K' cipher evokes a semi-anonymous case study of a replaceable everyman" (129). On K. as everyman, see also Sollars, "Franz Kafka's *The Trial* and Civil Disobedience," 259; Resina, "Gesture, Kafka's means to Silence," 17; Mladek, "Radical Play: Gesture, Performance, and the Theatrical Logic of the Law in Kafka," 225. Robertson describes K. as "ideal type of the modern professional man" ("Kafka, Goffman, and the Total Institution," 143.)

²¹⁸ "K. . . . griff sogar mit der Hand hin" (96); "griff mit der Hand an die Schläfe" (179).

²¹⁹ Mark Anderson addresses the lost connection between signs and meaning in *Kafka's Clothes*, 158: He describes clothes in *Der Proceß* as expression of a seemingly coherent sign system that stays incomprehensible to K. and the reader. Anderson furthermore links this to Kafka's break with the realist novel: "Unlike Balzac, or Thomas Mann, he never allows the external signs of his narrative world to become legible through a signifying system of cause and effect, surface and ground" (171). The lack of a relationship between signifier and signified can also be seen in a play with "real" and false names: „Titorelli ist nur sein Künstlernamen, seinen wirklichen Namen kenne ich gar nicht.“ (181), or K.'s question to Block: „Ist das ihr wirklicher Name?“ (227).

²²⁰ Here, my reading differs from most readings of gesture outlined in my literature overview; most scholars read K. as trying to decipher the meaning of the court's

gestures throughout (see, for example, Mladek, "Radical Play: Gesture, Performance, and the Theatrical Logic of the Law in Kafka," 227).

²²¹ Benjamin, "Franz Kafka. Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages", 418.

²²² Ibid., 419.

²²³ Ibid..

²²⁴ Ibid., 418.

²²⁵ Grundlehner, "Manual Gesture in Kafka's Prozeß," 194.

²²⁶ Of course, K. cannot be sure that there is no sense to the hand signs and this uncertainty fuels his paranoia. Nevertheless, both K. and the narrator seem to mostly acknowledge the interchangeability and arbitrariness of hand signs.

²²⁷ He takes a pencil "aus der Hand," (170) as well as a dictionary: "nahm ihm das Wörterbuch aus der Hand und blätterte offenbar ganz sinnlos darin" (277).

²²⁸ This comes after the following realizations: "K. wußte es nicht, wohl aber hielt er es bald für feststehend, daß seine Verteidigung nicht in guten Händen war" (165);

"Es war unbedingt nötig, daß K. selbst eingriff" (167).

²²⁹ Emphasis added unless otherwise noted.

²³⁰ Adorno describes Kafka's "Prinzip der Wörtlichkeit": "Zuweilen lösen die Worte, insbesondere Metaphern, sich los und gewinnen eigene Existenz. . . . Gelegentlich wird die Wörtlichkeit bis zum Assoziationswitz getrieben." (Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka," 306.) In a similar vein, Günther Anders describes Kafka's use of taking the figurative literal: "Kafka erfindet keine Bilder. Er übernimmt sie. Was an Sinnlichkeit in diesen Bildern da ist, nimmt er unter das Mikroskop . . . Das Detail beweist dann die Glaubwürdigkeit des Bildes, für das die Sprache die erste Verantwortung trug, noch einmal." (Anders, *Kafka pro und contra*, 42.)

²³¹ Günther Anders writes: "Denn es ist ja die ganz alltägliche Sprache, die, selbst in ihren mikroskopischen, ja, in ihren abstrakten Splintern, aus Metaphern besteht. Allen Präpositionen, wie z. B. ,unten', ,mit', ,zwischen' eignet ursprünglich räumlicher Bildsinn; und viele der sonderbarsten Konstellationen in den Kafkaschen Romanen werden sofort verständlich, wenn man sich klar macht, daß Kafka diesen ihren verschütteten Bildsinn wiedererweckt hat." (Anders, *Kafka pro und contra*, 41)

²³² For a detailed description of the court as "Körperschaft," see Andriopoulos, *Besessene Körper. Hypnose, Körperschaften und die Erfindung des Kinos*, 146-153.

²³³ The usher's wife "zeigte mit der nassen Hand auf die offene Tür des Nebenzimmers" (57).

²³⁴ "Zwischen zwei Männern hindurch, die sich unmittelbar bei der Tür unterhielten . . . faßte eine Hand nach K" (58).

²³⁵ Andriopoulos, *Besessene Körper. Hypnose, Körperschaften und die Erfindung des Kinos*, 152.

²³⁶ On the concept of prehension and its significance for human nature, see McGinn, *Prehension*.

²³⁷ The notion of wish fulfillment is emphasized through the fact that Kafka here uses an image that he has used in a letter to Felice (from February 1913) about a dream walking arm in arm, hand in hand with her: "Wie soll ich es also nur beschreiben, wie wir im Traum gegangen sind! Während beim bloßen Einhängen sich die Arme nur an zwei Stellen berühren und jeder einzelne seine Selbständigkeit behält, berührten sich unsere Schultern und die Arme lagen der ganzen Länge nach aneinander. Aber warte, ich zeichne es auf." This is followed by a drawing contrasting the "normal" "Eingehängtsein" with the one described. Kafka, *Briefe 1913-1914*, 87.

²³⁸ On the physiological phenomenon of tactility as a sense that subverts a clear subject-object distinction, see Wilke, *Medien der Unmittelbarkeit: Dingkonzepte und Wahrnehmungstechniken 1918-1993*, 110.

²³⁹ These "tactile disturbances" can also be seen in a context of a modernist crisis of vision and visibility as described by Andreas Huyssen in "The Disturbance of Vision in Vienna Modernism." See also Huyssen, "Kafka's Betrachtung in the Force Field of Photography and Film," where tactility is read in relation to the influence of visual media, especially of early cinema in Kafka's writing, through "somatic tactility and shock as effects of the illusion on the screen" (60), creating effects of "combining stereoscopic vision with cinematic motion" (77) through literary language.

²⁴⁰ This lack of private sphere can be linked to the insurance state, see Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*: "universal coverage also acts to obliterate the barriers between the public and the private" (190).

²⁴¹ Kafka, *Der Verschollene*, 409.

²⁴² Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 197.

²⁴³ The verb is used in both its economic and legal meaning when the merchant Block tells K. of his futile attempts to take control of his trial by negotiation himself at court "zu arbeiten und zu unterhandeln" (235).

²⁴⁴ Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes*, 22-25. In the context of *Der Proceß*, Anderson links the notion of "Verkehr" with Kafka's father's "Galanteriewaren" store, or, in German, "Handlung." "Handlung" thus also denotes the site at which economic negotiations and business transactions take place.

²⁴⁵ Such a layering of multiple hand meanings, including the allusions to writing that will be discussed in my third section, is found in Kafka's first letter to Felice Bauer. In an interpretation of this passage, Mark Anderson points to the multiple nuances that are contained in the figure of the hand: "By recalling the act of 'handing' over the photographs, 'one by one,' of 'holding hands' and confirming a 'promise,' Kafka conjures up both an erotic moment of intimacy and the solemn pledge of marriage . . . But hands signify something else as well . . . By identifying himself as the one whose 'very hand now striking the keys held your hand,' Kafka joins their pledge to travel together 'next year to Palestine,' perhaps as man and wife, to that strange commerce of writing that is soon to be established between them: a commerce of writing hands exchanging letters and gifts and stories [.]” Anderson, "Virtual Zion: The Promised Lands of the Kafka Critical Editions," 308.

²⁴⁶ For a reading of K.'s assault on Fräulein Bürstner as K.'s original guilt, see Maché, "The Bürstner Affair and Its Significance for the Courtroom Scenes and the End of Kafka's *Prozeß*." On the reversed order of this crime and the arrest, see also Kittler, "Heimlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit: Das österreichische Strafprozessrecht in Franz Kafkas Roman *Der Proceß*" 203.

²⁴⁷ Leni's hand, in its mistake, contains a symbolic marker of an impossibility of a more monogamous commitment in the placement of the "Verbindungshäutchen" specifically on a "Ringfinger" that would physically resist the placement of a ring. Wolf Kittler sees the mistake as a sign that Leni, unlike Fräulein Bürstner, cannot be a typewriter, which serves as a strong contrast between the women. See Kittler, "Die Klauen der Sirenen," 512-513.

²⁴⁸ Benjamin writes in his "Notizen zu Kafka: 'Der Prozeß'" a thought on this matter without further elaborating it: "Auswechselbare Personen? Der Direktor-Stellvertreter, Fräulein Bürstner, der Neffe der Wirtin: flüchtig hingemachte Männer" (1191).

²⁴⁹ On the general motif of proxies, see Densky, "Proxies in Kafka: Koncipist FK and Prokurist Josef K." Densky also describes the court's "network of representatives and affiliates" (128), and compares it to Kafka's own function as proxy at the insurance company (126).

²⁵⁰ Coffman, in "Bureaucracy and 'Homosexual Panic' in Franz Kafka's *Der Prozeß*," focuses on the "homoerotic bureaucratic structure" (25) of *Der Proceß*. Ring, in "In the Law's Hands" points to the "tactile pleasure to be had with men" (313),

including a convincing reading of the “titillating episodes with Titorelli” (314). See also Anderson, “Kafka, Homosexuality and the Aesthetics of ‘Male Culture.’”

²⁵¹ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 359.

²⁵² Ibid., 812.

²⁵³ Ibid., 23.

²⁵⁴ For detailed and convincing analyses of gesture in this context, see Mladek, “Radical Play: Gesture, Performance, and the Theatrical Logic of the Law in Kafka” and Puchner, “Reading the Sirens’ Gestures” and “Kafka’s Antitheatrical Gestures.” For a general reading of Kafka’s theatricality, see also Anderson, “[...] nicht mit großen Tönen gesagt’: On Theater and the Theatrical in Kafka,” 168.

²⁵⁵ On theatrical substitutions in relation to the institutions in *Der Proceß*, see Simons, “Schuld und Scham”: “K. ist persona im Sinne des römischen Rechts, Maske und Rolle. Als solche findet er sich aber im ‘Stellenplan’ einer Gesellschaft wieder, die ihre Institutionen, Gericht, Staat, und Familie, ihrerseits über die Vergabe von Rollen sichert” (276); “Institutionen gründen demnach auf der menschlichen Schauspielkunst, der Fähigkeit zur Substitution” (277).

²⁵⁶ Benjamin, “Franz Kafka. Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages,” 418.

²⁵⁷ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 329.

²⁵⁸ Benjamin, “Franz Kafka. Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages,” 419.

²⁵⁹ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 137-138.

²⁶⁰ This amalgamation is continued in the subsequent desk description: “Nur auf meinem Schreibtisch steht der Rasierspiegel aufrecht, wie man ihn zum Rasieren braucht, die Kleiderbürste liegt mit ihrer Borstenfläche auf dem Tuch, das Portemonnaie liegt offen für den Fall dass ich zahlen will, aus dem Schlüsselbund ragt ein Schlüssel fertig zur Arbeit vor und die Kravatte schlingt sich noch teilweise um den ausgezogenen Kragen.” (Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 138)

²⁶¹ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 138-139.

²⁶² Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 139. On this passage, see also Simons, “Schuld und Scham,” 272-273, and Höcker, “Literatur durch Verfahren,” 236-237. Regarding desks, see also Hüser, “Vorsingen in Amerika,” which discusses an art installation by Martin Kippenberger depicting Kafka’s *Der Verschollene*, consisting primarily of desks. See also Anderson, in *Kafka’s Clothes*, on Kafka’s description in a letter to Oskar Pollak from 1902 of a desk that “with its ornate carvings and sharp edges, physically wounds his body whenever he tries to write something ‘un-bourgeois’” (57).

²⁶³ On the writing of the Eingabe, see also Campe, "Schreiben im *Proceß*."

²⁶⁴ For example, Leni reports about Block: "Er hat den ganzen Tag über die gleiche Seite gelesen und beim Lesen den Finger die Zeilen entlanggeführt" (266).

²⁶⁵ See also 149.

²⁶⁶ A similar passage where white collar workers compensate with manual labor is found in *Das Schloß*: "die Hammerschläge erinnerten K. daran, was ihm irgendwo erzählt worden war, daß manche Beamte, um sich von der fortwährenden geistigen Anstrengung zu erholen, sich zeitweilig mit Tischlerei, Feinmechanik u.dgl. beschäftigen" (Kafka, *Das Schloß*, 382).

²⁶⁷ For example, Max Brod notes "daß [Kafka], mit seinem Beruf unzufrieden, längere Zeit in einer Tischlerei, dann auch als Gärtner arbeitete. (Brod, "Neben dem Schriftstellerberuf," 3.)

²⁶⁸ I will also come back to the layering of writing and manual labor in my final section.

²⁶⁹ Pasley, "Der Schreibakt und das Geschriebene. Zur Frage der Entstehung von Kafkas Texten," 9.

²⁷⁰ Pasley, "Die Handschrift redet," 26.

²⁷¹ Pasley, Malcolm, "Der Schreibakt und das Geschriebene. Zur Frage der Entstehung von Kafkas Texten," 10-11.

²⁷² In *Kafka's Clothes*, Anderson links Kafka's interest in athletics and the fascination with the "Turner" with rhetorical tropes and Kafka's "ideal of literary creativity." See *Kafka's Clothes*, 90. Similarly, one could include here the motion of the successfully writing hand. (In this sense, one could read the ending of "Das Urteil" also as an allusion to the writing hand when Georg Bendemann swings himself over the railing „als der ausgezeichnete Turner, der er in seinen Jugendjahren zum Stolz der Eltern gewesen war.“ Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 61).

²⁷³ Campe points to the "Aspekt des gestischen Körpers der intransitiven Schreibbewegung bzw. des transitiven Schreibens, das die Vorstellung des Körperschemas mit sich führt" ("Schreiben im *Process*", 126). Campe furthermore contrasts the handwriting of the Eingabe with the normal use of typewriters at K.'s office. On handwriting and typewriting hands, though not specifically on Kafka, see also Kammer, "Graphologie, Schreibmaschine, und die Ambivalenz der Hand" and Hoffmann, "Schreibmaschinenhände." Mark Anderson, in "[...] nicht mit großen Tönen gesagt": On Theater and the Theatrical in Kafka," describes the "focus on the body, on the external gesture and 'plastic' or material aspects of the spoken word"

(168) in Kafka's theatricality, and this focus could also be linked to the material, even gestural aspects of the written word.

²⁷⁴ Neumann, "Der verschleppte Prozeß. Literarisches Schaffen zwischen Schreibstrom und Werkidol," 84. See also Neumann, "Werk oder Schrift, Vorüberlegungen zur Edition von Kafkas Bericht für eine Akademie" where he contrasts the notions of "Verwirklichung im Spannungsfeld von Selbst-Genügsamkeit im intimen Akt des Schreibens einerseits, von Selbst-Verwandlung in das literarische Werk im kulturellen Universum der gedruckten Bücher andererseits" (158).

²⁷⁵ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 678.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 675f.

²⁷⁷ Kafka, *Briefe 1914-1917*, 32-33.

²⁷⁸ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 251.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 250.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 329.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 226.

²⁸² Ibid., 491.

²⁸³ Kafka, *Briefe 1913-1914*, 202.

²⁸⁴ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 463.

²⁸⁵ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 463. Such a moment of mystical union with the momentum of writing may be mirrored in the story itself in the enigmatic passage of the priest cutting a cross in the skin of his own hand, a motif that is taken much further in "In der Strafkolonie," which Kafka wrote when he took a two-week vacation in order to work on *Der Proceß*, and that he wrote instead, almost as if to compensate for the radically different, fragmented writing method of *Der Proceß*, trying to recreate what he called writing "mit solcher vollständige Öffnung des Leibes und der Seele" after writing "Das Urteil" (Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 461). The extreme attempt to recreate a direct, physical mode of writing can be seen thematically in "In der Strafkolonie" in the surrender and ecstasy through the writing of the execution machine that literally opens up the body and breaks the spirit through the torturous writing in blood on the skin.

²⁸⁶ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 2*, 53.

²⁸⁷ Kafka writes about this theme in his diary: "Aus einem Brief: 'Ich wärme mich daran in diesem traurigen Winter.' Die Metaphern sind eines in dem Vielen, was mich am Schreiben verzweifeln läßt. Die Unselbständigkeit des Schreibens, die Abhängigkeit von dem Dienstmädchen das einheizt, von der Katze, die sich am Ofen wärmt, selbst vom armen alten Menschen, der sich wärmt. Alles dies sind selbstständige, eigengesetzliche Verrichtungen, nur das Schreiben ist hilflos, wohnt nicht in sich selbst, ist Spaß und Verzweiflung" (Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 875).

²⁸⁸ The connection between the political and the gestural is also made by Mladek in conclusion of his article "Radical Play: Gesture, Performance, and the Theatrical Logic of the Law in Kafka": "The concept of gesture in Kafka reaches the political dimension by obstinately insisting on the inherent gesturality of the political and juridical sphere" (246).

²⁸⁹ See also Corngold, "The Ministry of Writing."

²⁹⁰ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 926.

²⁹¹ Günther Anders points out the meaning of the accidental for the plot of Kafka's works. See Anders, *Kafka pro und contra*, 31-32.

²⁹² Stanley Corngold points to parallels between Kafka's changes in the manuscript of *Der Proceß* and K.'s passivity and lack of control over his trial. See Corngold, "Medial Allusions at the Outset of *Der Proceß*; or, res in media." A similarly interwoven connection between writing and plot could be claimed for the hand scenes, where the writing hand becomes part of the plot and where the writing on the desk is layered with the court scenes.

²⁹³ Throughout the text, the roles of spectator and actor are reversed and appear as indistinguishable from one another. At the outset of the text, K. observes "die alte Frau die ihm gegenüber wohnte und die ihn mit einer an ihr ganz ungewöhnlichen Neugierde beobachtete" (7). He feels the impact of the surveillance, but reveals himself as a reliable supervisor as well, since he can make this statement about the changed degree of the supervision. The same dynamic occurs repeatedly when K. observes observers and even points them out to others: "'Dort sind auch solche Zuschauer,' rief K. ganz laut dem Aufseher zu und zeigte mit dem Zeigefinger hinaus" (24). At the end, he observes the executioner's observation of his own death. Joseph Vogl sees herein the essence of Kafka's theatricality: "Sehen heißt also zugleich gesehen werden, Beobachter sind zugleich Beobachtete, und gerade diese Reflexivität des Blicks stellt Kafkas Figuren auf einen doppelten Boden, über dem sich jeder Raum zum Bühnenraum umordnet" (Vogl, *Ort der Gewalt. Kafkas literarische Ethik*, 15).

²⁹⁴ In my next chapter, I show how all these dimensions are even further condensed in a shorter text from 1917, where the legal battle as well as the (hypothetical) execution take place on the desk.

²⁹⁵ The motifs of stone, hands touching and even penetrating the earth, writing, and death are also found in the fragment “Ein Traum,” whose protagonist Josef K. admires an artist’s artful writing on his own gravestone in the very moment when he immerses his hands into the soil. The fragment’s phrasing (“mit allen Fingern grub er in die Erde”) echoes the phrasing of *Der Proceß*’s last chapter’s “er spreizte alle Finger” (312) as well as “mit zwanzig Händen in die Welt hineinfahren.” See Wilke, “Diesseits der Schrift” for a reading focusing on writing and the written word. Wilke also links this to Jewish writing traditions, and as a continuation of this argument one could even think of Jewish gravestones, including many at the Prague cemetery, that feature traditional hand symbols.

²⁹⁶ For an analysis of the stone quarry text that also links it to certain notions of knowledge and law in *Der Proceß*, see Greenberg, “The Trial in the Stone Quarry.” See also Hermsdorf, “Arbeit und Amt als Erfahrung und Gestaltung,” 40.

²⁹⁷ Benno Wagner uses the term “Schuldverhältnis” to describe Ewald’s concept of a new social contract (Wagner, “Kafkas phantastisches Büro,” 106). See also Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*: “In a system of risk management it becomes meaningless to differentiate between guilt and innocence . . . Thus everyone stands before the law on a continuous basis and everyone is potentially liable” (193).

²⁹⁸ This is a connection made by Ring in “In the Law’s Hands,” which refers to the illustrations only and does not include the insurance context but emphasizes that in the trial, they take on a different meaning of “perverse fascination” (315). She reads the passage in a context of “perverse tactility” (313), and a fetishistic aspect of the gloves, also pointing to the expression “scharf auf jemanden sein,” (314) linking the sharpness of the gloves with K.’s erotic excesses, which include the execution. Though different from my reading, it also links the erotic sphere with the sphere of the trial.

²⁹⁹ This is also true of Kafka, who, even though he personally in this case writes about preventing deaths in the quarry, is also at the service of the “große Organisation” (339) that accepts accident risks as normal in the first place.

³⁰⁰ “Zerstreuung” or “zerstreut” is mentioned 17 times explicitly, and K.’s lack of concentration is furthermore addressed in numerous passages.

³⁰¹ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 460.

³⁰² Pasley, “Die Handschrift redet,” 22. The interchangeability of the middle chapter is intentional in the layout of the Stroemfeld edition, where they are in separate thin individual volumes.

³⁰³ Ring describes the fragmentation of Kafka's entire oeuvre: "Cut up and scattered across space, Kafka's oeuvre itself appears as a collection of amputated limbs that sit apart from any main corpus." (Ring, "In the Law's Hands," 319).

³⁰⁴ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 2*, 514.

³⁰⁵ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 200.

³⁰⁶ Kafka, *Der Verschollene*, 50.

³⁰⁷ Hofmannsthal, "Über Charaktere im Roman und im Drama: Gespräch zwischen Balzac und Hammer-Purgstall in einem Döblinger Garten im Jahre 1842," 485-486. Kafka's admiration and knowledge of Hofmannsthal is well documented, see for example Schmitz-Emans, "Kafka und die Weltliteratur," 288. See also Cohn, "Kafka and Hofmannsthal."

³⁰⁸ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 389.

³⁰⁹ I haven't found any analysis, only brief mentions of the text, for example in Reuß, "Die Oxforder Oktavhefte 3 und 4. Zur Einführung," 6-8; Degner, "Was ich berühre zerfällt," 73-75; Friedrich, "Die Topophobie der Handschrift," 210-211. These readings occur in a very different context (that of "Handschriftlichkeit") from the one treated here. I will come back to Friedrich's article, which is primarily about "Ein Bericht für eine Akademie," in my conclusion.

³¹⁰ The existing research on Kafka and the war is relatively recent. This is a gap pointed out by the editors Engel and Robertson of the 2012 volume *Kafka. Prag und der erste Weltkrieg*: "Für den ersten Weltkrieg und die ihn umgebenen Diskurse haben sich allerdings weder die sozialgeschichtliche noch die neohistorische Kafka-Forschung interessiert." This volume is intended to begin to fill this gap. It provides important historical background, which I will refer to in my second section. Articles that deal with literary texts focus, among a few other texts, on Kafka's "China" texts, "Beim Bau der chinesischen Mauer" and "Ein altes Blatt," (see for example Engel, "China and China revisited" and Wagner, "Fürsprache, Widerstreit, Dialog") as well as Kafka's relatively few direct statements about the war in diaries and letters. I will engage with some of these articles in my second section as well.

Stach's Kafka biography has shed light on the significance of the war for Kafka. (See Stach, *Die Jahre der Entscheidungen* and *Die Jahre der Erkenntnis*.) Stach's work is reflected strongly in the above-mentioned collection of articles. Stach also has a contribution in the volume, "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," which summarizes much of the biographical background. All three texts are important sources for my third section, in addition to contemporary research on amputations and prosthetics.

Other relatively recent research linking specific texts by Kafka to the war are Duttlinger, "Snapshots of History," treating the "Blumfeld" fragment; Anz, "Kafka,

der Krieg, und das größte Theater der Welt,” treating the Okahoma chapter of *Der Verschollene*; Kittler, “Grabenkrieg - Nervenkrieg - Medienkrieg,” treating “Der Bau”; and Wagner, “Lightning No Longer Flashes,” treating the “China” texts. See also Svenmo, *Just a Business Deal*, which covers some specific economic, war-related aspects in regard to *Der Proceß*.

³¹¹ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 389-390.

³¹² Campe, “Kafkas Fürsprache,” 210, Footnote 28.

³¹³ The “regularity” of the movement recalls the forced rhythmic hand movements and the de-personalization and objectification that come with it discussed in Chapter 1.

³¹⁴ Marx and Engels, “Das Kapital,” Vol. I, 531.

³¹⁵ Emphasis added.

³¹⁶ Possibly, Kafka anticipates what for Brecht will be the “role of boxing as a social parable: for Brecht, boxing serves as a microcosm of market-driven capitalist society. Within this economy, the boxer is the flexible product and commodity of a clever production and marketing system, in which he serves the role of athlete, model, and movie star.” (Klenner, “Vermieter des Intellekts,” 66.)

³¹⁷ In *Der Proceß*, we’ve seen human hands described as Krallen (K.’s and Leni’s), and here, the hand, the very symbol for human identity, becomes an animal. This resonates not only with the “Hund” of the end of *Der Proceß*, but it also will be taken up in “Ein Bericht für eine Akademie”, as I will show in my conclusion.

³¹⁸ See Kittler, “Grabenkrieg-Nervenkrieg-Medienkrieg.”

³¹⁹ See Birgfeld, “Der erste Weltkrieg im Prager Tagblatt,” 33-34.

³²⁰ Stach describes how in the regions that were not directly affected by the war, such as Prague, the personal, geographical and psychological distance created an initial enthusiasm for the war that subsided only once the personal stakes became obvious, for example through casualties of personal friends or relatives. He describes such a development through the example of Stefan Zweig. (See *Die Jahre der Entscheidungen*, 528.) In “Meine zwei Hände,” a similar moment is illustrated when through the move of the head close to the table, all of a sudden the personal and individual dimension is obvious, and there is a development from the abstract battle to the individual hands with individual life stories that makes explicit the uneven conflict and the consequences of violence, and affect the narrator personally. The text is therefore also an illustration of the development of the perception of the war and the realization of the destructive potential of the battle.

³²¹ Birgfeld, in “Der erste Weltkrieg im Prager Tagblatt,” examines the influence of the war in the Prager Tagblatt. He includes the issue from January 6, 1917, in which Kafka published “Ein Traum.” Examining this issue of the newspaper as an example for war journalism he shows its typical characteristics regarding the references to the war, such as disputes of false reports (22), and characteristic gaps in the text that were indicating censored passages (25).

³²² Cornwall, “The Wartime Bohemia of Franz Kafka,” 38.

³²³ Birgfeld, “Der erste Weltkrieg im Prager Tagblatt,” 28.

³²⁴ See *ibid.*

³²⁵ Kafka, *Briefe 1914-1917*, 272; see also Anz, “Motive des Militärischen in Kafkas Erzähltexten seit August 1914,” 174.

³²⁶ Dodd, “Kafka’s Russia and Images of War in 1912 and 1914,” 213. Dodd continues: “There may be camouflage, too, in the ambiguous reference to the traveller as ‘Forscher des Abendlandes’ . . . — an investigator from the West, or of the West?” (213).

³²⁷ See Stach, “Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen,” 167.

³²⁸ For an analysis of specific allegiances of Czechs, Germans, and German and Czech Jews, see Cornwall, “The Wartime Bohemia of Franz Kafka,” especially 40-43.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³³⁰ Nekula, “Kafkas ‘organische’ Sprache. Sprachdiskurs als Kampfdiskurs,” 248.

³³¹ For Jewish reactions to the “Juden zählung” in Prague publications, see Edelmann, “Geschichtstheologische Strategien zionistischer Gegenwartsdeutung in der Prager jüdischen Wochenzeitung Selbstwehr (1914-1918),” 83-86.

³³² Nolte, “Inter arma silent Musae? Culture in Wartime Prague,” 101.

³³³ Cornwall, “The Wartime Bohemia of Franz Kafka,” 46-47.

³³⁴ The issue of community was omnipresent in the nationalist differences, but also in the inner-Jewish discourses. Cornwall points out that in general, Prague Jews were torn between different loyalties, “to Austria, to German (or Czech) culture, and to Judaism,” “The Wartime Bohemia of Franz Kafka,” 43.

³³⁵ Cornwall “The Wartime Bohemia of Franz Kafka,” 45. See also Kittler, “Grabenkrieg-Nervenkrieg-Medienkrieg,” 302.

³³⁶ Wagner, “Lightning No Longer Flashes,” 74-55.

³³⁷ Wagner, "Lightning No Longer Flashes," 77, note 22.

³³⁸ Engel, "China and China revisited," 225.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ See Wagner, "Fürsprache-Widerstreit-Dialog," 271.

³⁴¹ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 359.

³⁴² Ibid., 358.

³⁴³ Ibid., 359.

³⁴⁴ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 337. See also Kafka, Briefe 1914-1917, 291-291 and Engel, "China and China revisited," 231.

³⁴⁵ See the facsimile in the Stroemfeld edition (Kafka, *Oxford Oktavheft 4*, 100-109).

³⁴⁶ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 388.

³⁴⁷ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1, Apparatband*, 326-327. See also Kafka, *Oxford Oktavheft 4*, 132-136.

³⁴⁸ For this phenomenon of a sacralization of the war, see Edelmann,

"Geschichtstheologische Strategien zionistischer Gegenwartsdeutung in der Prager jüdischen Wochenzeitung Selbstwehr (1914-1918)."

³⁴⁹ But the stance taken by Kafka seems more critical of violence, for example compared to a text by Buber that features another angel whose pacifist attempts are proven to be futile. See Buber, "Der Engel und die Weltherrschaft."

³⁵⁰ Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 75.

³⁵¹ See Stach, "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," 164.

³⁵² Stach, *Die Jahre der Entscheidungen*, 544

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ See Burrow, *Risk and Insurance*, 73-75.

³⁵⁶ Hermsdorf and Wagner, "Einführung," 78. See also Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, Materials No. 26, 518.

³⁵⁷ Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 498.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 497.

³⁵⁹ Kafka, *Amtliche Schriften*, 494.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 496.

³⁶² Stach, "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," 166. Italics in the original.

³⁶³ See Stach "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," 165.

³⁶⁴ See Stach, *Die Jahre der Entscheidungen*, 529-60.

³⁶⁵ See Kafka, Briefe 18-20, 45.

³⁶⁶ See Wagner, "Historical Background," 42.

³⁶⁷ See Stach, *Die Jahre der Erkenntnis*, 81.

³⁶⁸ Stach "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," 164.

³⁶⁹ See Stach, *Die Jahre der Erkenntnis*, 81; 90.

³⁷⁰ "Auszug aus einer Liste für Invalide" from 1915, published in *Der Arbeitsnachweis. Zeitschrift für Arbeitslosigkeit, Arbeitsvermittlung, Auswanderung und innere Kolonisation*, cited in Stach, *Die Jahre der Erkenntnis*, 76-77.

³⁷¹ For a description of how Taylorism became mainstream in Europe during (and due to) the war, see Rabinbach, *The Human Motor*, 238-270.

³⁷² Giese, *Psychologie der Arbeitshand*, 1.

³⁷³ See Rieger, "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 170.

³⁷⁴ Katz, *Der Aufbau der Tastwelt*, 6.

³⁷⁵ See also Wilke, *Medien der Unmittelbarkeit*, 134-139.

³⁷⁶ See Rieger "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 165.

³⁷⁷ Giese, "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand," 55.

³⁷⁸ Katz, *Der Aufbau der Tastwelt*, 6.

³⁷⁹ See Rieger, "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 172.

³⁸⁰ Rieger emphasizes that this decision about form and function not only affects the prosthesis but is of relevance especially at the moment of "kinetic surgeries" that reshape the stump for the prosthesis and its specific function ("Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 179). He also points out the large number of "Erfahrungsberichte" that abound around this time, for example Max Cohn's, "Meine Erfahrungen mit dem Carnes-Arm. Mit einer technischen Beschreibung der Prothese von Ingenieur Fritz Tiessen" from 1917 (178).

³⁸¹ See Neutra, "Zur Psychologie der Prothese," 1239, cited in Rieger "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 175-176.

³⁸² Rieger, "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 177.

³⁸³ Cf. Rieger, "Arbeitshand und Ausdruckshand. Zur Prothetik des Menschen," 178.

³⁸⁴ See Stach, *Die Jahre der Erkenntnis*, 81; 90.

³⁸⁵ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 148.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 342.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 362.

³⁸⁹ Tobias Wilke writes about the effects of prosthetics on aesthetics: "Gegenüber den substitutiv wirksamen Prothesen tritt die komplementäre Beziehung von Hand und Werkzeug in den 1920er Jahren daher umso deutlicher, ja in historisch nie zuvor realisierter Schärfe als ein intaktes in den Blick. In ihren Umschreibungen und Konzeptionen wird nun nicht nur ein epochales Begehren nach körperlicher Unversehrtheit manifest; vielmehr kommt in ihnen auch ein Bedürfnis nach harmonischer Interaktion mit einer Dingwelt zum tragen, die sich im Rahmen des ersten Weltkriegs auf zerstörerischste Weise gegen den Menschen und seine Hand zu kehren begonnen hat. . . . die ersehnte vollständige (Re-)Integration von organischer und dinglicher Sphäre soll sich dadurch einstellen, dass das 'Tastmedium' des Werkzeugs nicht — wie etwa im Fall der Prothese — als trennendes Hindernis in den Blick tritt, sondern zu einem unmittelbaren Element im Handlungsprozess wird." *Medien der Unmittelbarkeit*, 139. (Italics in original. Kafka is at the forefront of recognizing this tension. In 1917, he writes: "Was ich berühre, zerfällt" (*Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 407). And in 1919: "Ich habe einen starken Hammer, aber ich kann ihn nicht benutzen, denn sein Schaft glüht" (*Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 2*, 354). Writing tools as well as

people are affected, when Kafka asks in 1921: "Was verbindet Dich mit diesen festabgegrenzten, sprechenden, augenblitzenden Körpern enger als mit irgendeiner Sache, etwa dem Federhalter in Deiner Hand? Etwa daß Du von ihrer Art bist? Aber Du bist nicht von ihrer Art, darum hast Du ja diese Frage aufgeworfen." The next entry reads: "Die feste Abgegrenztheit der menschlichen Körper ist schauerlich" (*Tagebücher*, 872).

³⁹⁰ Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 262.

³⁹¹ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 334.

³⁹² Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 301-302.

³⁹³ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 2*, 325.

³⁹⁴ See Stach, *Die Jahre der Erkenntnis*, 34-5. See also Stach "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," 170.

³⁹⁵ Kafka, *Briefe 14-17*, 127.

³⁹⁶ See Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 786.

³⁹⁷ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 543.

³⁹⁸ See Anz, "Motive des Militärischen," 173.

³⁹⁹ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 543.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 677.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 771-772.

⁴⁰² See Cornwall, "The Wartime Bohemia of Franz Kafka," 43. Cornwall also observes that Kafka "channelled this temporary excitement . . . into the idea of writing" (*Ibid.*).

⁴⁰³ Stach, "Franz Kafka, kriegsgefangen," 162-163.

⁴⁰⁴ Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 867

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 926.

⁴⁰⁶ In treating the theme of animals and humans in Kafka, this opens up a whole field of discussion that my take on Bericht of course cannot exhaust.

⁴⁰⁷ I have found only one article that views "Meine zwei Hände" as important text for the genesis of Bericht, however without further elaborating on the details of what

the relationship between the texts consist in (Friedrich, "Die Topophobie der Handschrift," 210-211). Another publication mentions the the texts together in a different context, see my discussion below of Göller, *Sprache, Literatur, kultureller Kontext*, 74, note 125. Before the final version and "Meine zwei Hände," there are two unfinished versions of "Bericht." The first fragment is the account of a narrator who doesn't actually meet Rotpeter, the speaking ape, and instead describes an encounter and conversation with Rotpeter's impresario, taking place in front of Rotpeter's hotel room. Rotpeter is described in the third person throughout that text. The second fragment is a dialogue; a conversation between a character that bears similarities to the first person narrator of the first version, and Rotpeter himself. Both fragments are overall light in tone and show absurd, grotesque and ridiculous scenes. Only at the end of the second fragment, the tone changes, and a long monologue by Rotpeter is very close to the tone of Bericht, before it breaks off.

Both fragments are also attempts to find the right narrative perspective and tone, a fact that is almost made explicit when the visitor, upon Rotpeter's account of his capture, exclaims: "Im Käfig! Im Zwischendeck! Anders liest man davon und anders faßt man es auf, wenn man sie selbst es erzählen hört." (Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 387-388) This sentence reflects the shifts in perspective both within the second fragment, where the dialogue becomes a monologue and from first to second fragment, from a second hand account by the impresario to Rotpeter speaking himself. This reflection is confirmed and developed further by Rotpeter, anticipating the narrative perspective of Bericht: "Und noch anders, wenn man es selbst erlebt hat mein Herr." (Ibid., 388) The second fragment breaks off after Rotpeter describes his transport on the ship from Africa to Germany. He is crouched in a small cage, and considers his options, ending with a shift to the second person and the question: "Wohin willst Du?" (Ibid.) before the text breaks off, as if unable to answer its own question of how to proceed. "Meine zwei Hände" follows, and it can be read as a reflection on the right voice and narrative perspective on the Rotpeter text. "Meine zwei Hände" has a function similar to a hand study in the visual arts: capturing the essence of the larger context in both trying to represent it entirely in a miniature setting and at the same time studying and perhaps practicing the representation of one set of problems for the larger work.

There are important structural connections between the Rotpeter texts and "Meine zwei Hände." "Meine zwei Hände" is a self study, as is "Bericht" für eine Akademie, written in the first person from Rotpeter's own perspective. In "Meine zwei Hände," a violent, fatal ending in the subjunctive mode is contrasted with a more moderate, but "dishonest" ending, as I've shown in the previous chapter. A parallel process takes place in "Bericht": After the cage passage in the final version, when considering the option of escaping, a passage in the subjunctive follows that lays out the violent, fatal potential outcomes: "Man hätte mich, kaum war der Kopf hinausgesteckt, wieder eingefangen und in einen noch schlimmeren Käfig gesperrt; oder ich hätte mich unbemerkt zu anderen Tieren, etwa zu den Riesenschlangen mir

gegenüber flüchten können und mich in ihren Umarmungen ausgehaucht; oder es wäre mir gar gelungen, mich bis aufs Deck zu stehlen und über Bord zu springen, dann hätte ich ein Weilchen auf dem Weltmeer geschaukelt und wäre ersoffen” (307). Instead, Rotpeter chooses the “Ausweg” (304) to become a member of human society, a dishonest, inauthentic alternative—the “Ausweg” is called “Täuschung” (305)—but that allows him to survive. As in “Meine zwei Hände”, the “happy” ending is achieved by submission under the restraints that come with being part of a community, or organism. Both texts feature underlying violence as condition of coexistence.

⁴⁰⁸ Kafka, *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 300. All page numbers in the text refer to *Drucke zu Lebzeiten* unless otherwise specified.

⁴⁰⁹ Benno Wagner links this passage to Quételet’s “Durchschnittsmensch” and the statistical worldview of accident insurance (“Kafkas phantastisches Büro,” 112).

⁴¹⁰ See also Göller, *Sprache, Literatur, kultureller Kontext*, 74, note 125 where Göller establishes a connection between the writing hand and the five years that separate Rotpeter from the apedon. Göller also mentions “Meine zwei Hände” in this context, but without further linking it to Bericht.

⁴¹¹ Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente 1*, 390.

⁴¹² “Meine zwei Hände” contains both images that frame “Bericht”, that of the greeting hand and that of the hiding one: Whereas the right hand takes off the hat for jovial greetings, the left hand is anxiously fumbling around the speaker’s thigh.

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